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# **CULTURAL RESOURCES SERIES**

**NO.2  
HISTORICAL**



**AN ISOLATED EMPIRE:  
A HISTORY OF NORTHWEST COLORADO**

**FREDERIC J. ATHEARN**

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AN ISOLATED EMPIRE:

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By Frederic J. Athearn

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Chronological Summary	i
Chapter	
I NORTHWESTERN COLORADO PRIOR TO EXPLOITATION	1
II THE FUR TRADE	11
III EXPLORATION IN NORTHWESTERN COLORADO	23
IV MINING AND TRANSPORTATION IN EARLY WESTERN COLORADO	33
V CONFRONTATIONS: SETTLEMENT VERSUS THE UTE INDIANS	44
VI SETTLEMENT IN MIDDLE PARK AND THE YAMPA VALLEY	61
VII DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATTLE AND SHEEP INDUSTRY	74
VIII MINING AND TRANSPORTATION 1890-1920	88
IX THE "MOFFAT ROAD" AND NORTHWESTERN COLORADO, 1903-1948	100
X DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHWESTERN COLORADO 1890-1940	112
Bibliography	126



## ILLUSTRATIONS

Discovery of hot springs of northwestern Colorado	21
Miners operate a sluice	38
Hot Sulphur Springs, Colorado, 1900	71
Preparing for steer round-up	80
Yampa Valley coal mines, 1920	95
Rio Grande <i>Zephyr</i>	103
Map - Great Divide, Colorado ca. 1916	122
1 The Indians	10
2 Fur Trade Areas	22
3 The Explorers	32
4 Early Mining and Settlement	43
5 The Thornburgh Massacre	60
6 Settlement in Middle Park and the Yampa Valley	73
7 Concentration of Sheep and Cattle Areas	87
8 Later Mining and Transportation	99
9 The Moffat Road	111
10 Northwest Colorado, 1890-1940	125



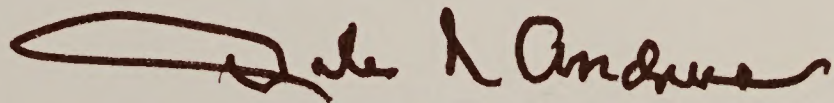
## FOREWARD

*This presents the second in a series of cultural resource reports. This study concerns historic sites and values on National Resource Lands in Colorado. It was originally derived from a study that was an integral part of the Bureau of Land Management's Cultural Resource Program.*

*A major objective of the Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior, is to preserve and/or scientifically study cultural resources, including prehistoric, historic sites and values. The evidence of historic remains cover large areas of National Resource Lands under our jurisdiction.*

*Originally compiled by Dr. F. J. Athearn to provide a baseline narrative for the history of BLM's Craig District, this edition represents a rewritten and newly illustrated publication of that document for public use and enjoyment. It is the first time a history of Northwestern Colorado has been written. As histories of the balance of Colorado are written, they will be made available to the public.*

*It is my pleasure to share these efforts with you for your professional and leisure reading.*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Dale R. Andrus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "D".

DALE R. ANDRUS  
State Director  
Colorado  
Bureau of Land Management



This presents the second in a series of reports of the  
This study concerns historical sites and objects in Colorado. It  
focuses on Colorado. It was originally prepared for the  
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John L. Johnson  
Bureau of Land Management  
Denver, Colorado



## INTRODUCTION AND

## CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Frederic J. Athearn  
Denver, Colorado  
July, 1972*







# INTRODUCTION AND

## CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY









Man's use and occupation of the northwestern corner of Colorado dates from about 10,000 years ago. The first men historically recorded were the Ute Indians; early Europeans found these natives thriving in the area. The Spanish were the first white men to see this region, reaching the White River basin in 1776. The Dominguez-Escalante Expedition of that year provided some sparse information about the land and people, but little else. The first true exploiters of the land were the fur trappers who came after 1800.

Before 1820 scattered trappers had worked the central Rockies, but no organized effort was made at wholesale trapping. In 1822 William H. Ashley organized a major expedition that went into the Green River country and opened it for trade. For the next twenty years the fur trade in the northwestern section of Colorado boomed, and thousands of beaver were trapped. In 1838 a trading post named Fort Davy Crockett was built to serve the trade, but by 1843 the fort was abandoned, as the trade died. The decline of the fur trade in the region was attributed to changing styles in fashion and the natural depletion of the resource.

Shortly before and following the collapse of the fur trade, several explorers came into this area. The first men to write about the region were private travelers; F. A. Wislizenus came in 1839, Willard Smith and Thomas J. Farnham in 1840; all noted the area was of little consequence. The first true explorer to reach the area was John C. Frémont; in 1844 he brought an army expedition into the Green River, Brown's Hole,



and west. He was on an official government mission designed to map the region and seek routes for new trails west. Frémont said very little about Colorado, but noted that, in his opinion, this country was nearly worthless; in 1845 his second expedition into the area concluded much the same.

The next official exploration came in 1869, when John Wesley Powell was commissioned to map the Green and Colorado Rivers. He gathered much new data about the Great Basin, noting that the Brown's Park area was of little value, and the only way this part of the state would ever develop would be with irrigation.

The discovery of gold in 1859 near Denver precipitated a major rush to Colorado in that year. Despite the promise of the discoveries, the initial boom died out; however, not before prospectors and miners had flowed over the Continental Divide into Middle Park, the Blue River region, and even North Park. Breckenridge was founded in 1859 and became a major population center. By 1861 gold had been discovered near Hahn's Peak, but the Civil War prevented its development until 1865. By 1870 Hahn's Peak was a booming mining town, and Middle Park was being settled. Placer mines were developing on Independence Mountain in North Park. However, two factors kept the region from developing on a larger scale: the first was the presence of the Ute Indians, and the second was the lack of transportation.

The second problem was alleviated first in 1869. When the Union Pacific (the Transcontinental) was completed in that year, rail transport across Wyoming was within sixty miles of the northwest corner. Soon



cattlemen moved into Brown's Park, and by 1871 a major industry had developed along the Little Snake, the Green, and the Yampa (Bear) Rivers. By 1876 cattle were grazed in North Park by J. O. Pinkham, and along the White River near the future site of the town of Meeker.

The first problem, the Utes, was not solved until after 1879. The Ute Nation owned all of northwestern Colorado by the terms of the Brunot Treaty of 1873. By this treaty two reservations were established: to the south the Los Pinos Agency took care of the Southern Utes, while to the north the White River Agency was founded to care for the Northern Utes. A series of agents had come and gone by 1879, and the next to the last, Reverend H. A. Danforth, resigned in disgust over U. S. Indian policy and its failure to keep promises to his wards. He was replaced by Nathan C. Meeker in 1879. Meeker, a typical product of the nineteenth century, felt that the American native was not productive, and that to make the Indian a useful citizen, he had to be taught the ways of the white men. This meant, in Meeker's mind, that the Indian must become a copy of all the best in the white men as he saw them.

The Utes were not willing to give up their traditional ways for Meeker or any other white man. The conflict between the two cultures developed over agriculture and Meeker's compulsory conversion of the Ute from a nomadic to a sedentary citizen. Finally, in September of 1879, the explosion came. Meeker was shoved by a Ute chief, Johnson, and he wired for help from Fort Steele, Wyoming. By the end of that month, troops were sent under the command of Major Thomas T. Thornburgh. The Thornburgh detachment was ambushed along the Milk River, despite attempts



by both Thornburgh and the Ute Chiefs, Douglas and Colorow, to avoid hostilities. The Thornburgh Battle occurred at the same time the White River Agency was attacked by Utes under Chief Johnson. Meeker and eleven male employees were killed; Meeker's wife, daughter, and several other women were captured. After nearly three months of negotiations, with the help of powerful Chief Ouray and his wife, Chipeta, the women were released; the leaders of the rebellion gave themselves up, and a commission was established to determine guilt. In the end, the citizens of Colorado who had cried, "the Utes must go" won. The Northern Utes were moved to Utah in 1881, where they still reside, and the land that was taken from them was opened to settlement.

Once the northwest corner was cleared of Indians, homesteaders moved in, and the open range cattle industry expanded. Between 1880 and 1895 a series of towns sprang up and became merchandising centers. Steamboat Springs was founded in 1885, Craig in 1889, Hayden in 1895, Meeker in 1882, Rangely in 1882, and numerous smaller places like Lay, Maybell, and Axial developed as a direct consequence of the Ute removal.

The introduction of cattle to the range provided a major industry in the northwest corner for nearly fifty years. However, there were conflicts over use of the land. Homesteaders tried to settle land that was used by cattlemen. In some cases they were driven off, while in others they persisted. Cattlemen also fought with sheep raisers, who by the 1890s were beginning to bring sheep into the lush pastures of the forest lands in the Elk River Valley and other valleys. Violent conflicts erupted between these two factions, despite the fact that most cattlemen



did not own the land they used, which was nearly all public domain. Sheepmen were murdered and sheep were destroyed. The climax of the sheep wars came in Rio Blanco county with the "battle" of Yellowjacket Pass. That year the Colorado State Militia was called in and peace was restored.

In 1891 the first of the major forest reserves was created. This withdrew millions of acres of prime grazing land from the public domain and forced cattlemen to compete with all others for grazing permits. The White River Timber Reserve of 1891 was followed by the creation of Routt and Roosevelt Forests in 1905, and Arapahoe Forest in 1906. These withdrawals caused much bitterness among cattle raisers, while sheepmen and settlers aligned with the U. S. Forest Service to stop open range grazing, and thereby permit more equitable rights for all. By 1915 this goal had been accomplished, and the smaller cattle outfits, sheepmen, and settlers were all using public lands.

In 1934 the Taylor Grazing Service was created to control grazing (and over-grazing) on public lands other than forest withdrawals. This service allotted land to cattlemen, sheepmen, and others for grazing purposes. For all practical purposes, the balance of public domain land in northwestern Colorado was withdrawn from homesteading by this Act, and the era of the open range ended. In 1946 the General Land Office, the original dispenser of public lands, and the Grazing Service were merged and became the Bureau of Land Management. This organization has continued to issue grazing permits, and for the most part has kept the public domain from being overused.



The cattle industry was not the only factor in the development of northwestern Colorado. New transportation routes developed to serve the various communities that were growing in the region as the settlers came into the river valleys of the Elk, the Little Snake, the Yampa, the Green and the White. Mineral exploitation took place in areas like Fortification Creek and Blue Mountain, while hay and grains were grown to provide food and fodder. The Yampa Valley became a major hay raising area, while the far West was still a cattle region.

In Middle Park, one of the earliest areas of settlement, development continued. Tourism, a mainstay since the 1860s, continued to grow there, and settlers took up increasing areas along the creeks where they raised cattle and some hay. To the north - in the North Park area - settlement was later; ranchers did not turn this land into cattle range until the 1880s. It was discovered that hay was a good local crop, and the area became the source of some of the world's finest hay. Mining continued on Independence Mountain; around the turn of the century coal and copper was discovered in North Park. A small boom ensued, but nothing substantial came of it.

When the famous Moffat Road came into Middle Park, then pushed on to Steamboat Springs, and later into Craig, transportation became cheap and easy. For the first time cattle could be shipped directly to Denver without long drives; sheep also could be shipped more directly; hay, coal, wheat and other crops could be exported easily and at a profit, while the land was opened to more settlers.

The hope was that the Yampa Coal Fields would provide the basic revenue for the Moffat Road; however, while a coal "boom" occurred in



Chapter 1

towns like Oak Creek, Phippsburg, Mount Harris, and others, the road was bankrupt by 1909. The promise of the railroad was never fulfilled.

Another boom during this period was oil. From its discovery in the White River region in the 1890s, to the exploitation of the minerals near Rangely in 1902 (Poole Well), oil was a marginal product. By 1920 the industry had developed to the point that numerous oil fields, such as the Moffat, Iles, Rangely, Danforth and other areas, were in full production. In North Park, the North McCallum field was also brought in during the mid-1920s.

Other developments after 1900 included the creation of Rocky Mountain National Park and Dinosaur National Monument. In 1920 the construction of Highway 40 provided the first paved road in the northwest corner of the state. These parks and improved roads brought more tourists into northwestern Colorado; railroads, auto roads, and later airplanes, helped to make the northwest more accessible.

In 1917 the last major homestead effort was made north and west of Craig. This was the Great Divide Homestead Colony Number One, developed by Volney T. Hoggatt and promoted by the *Denver Post*. Hundreds of settlers were lured into the Great Divide area where they scratched out a living dryland farming until the drought-filled days of the 1930s. This experiment in dryland homesteading was a failure; it was one of the last booms in the region.

A final boom occurred with the construction of the Moffat Tunnel, begun in 1923 and completed in 1927. With the completion of the tunnel, it was assumed that the Moffat Road would be finished to



Salt Lake City, and the northwest would be revived. However, the Moffat Tunnel only shortened the route of the railroad and, because of the poor financial condition of the Moffat Road, the Denver and Rio Grande Western leased the right-of-way. By the 1930s the Dotsero Cutoff was completed and, for all practical purposes, the Craig route became the branch service line. The northwest again languished.

Since the 1930s the northwestern corner of Colorado has subsisted on agriculture, oil, some coal, and more recently tourists, mainly skiers. Within the last ten years oil shale development has shown promise; more importantly, due to the national energy demands of the last few years, the coal industry has been revived and a new boom seems imminent.

This region's history was one of constant "booms" that never worked out. From fur to mining, cattle to oil, coal to oil shale and back to coal, the northwest corner of Colorado showed great promise, but for various reasons, it has never been able to fulfill the dream that seemed so real.



## Chapter I

# NORTHWESTERN COLORADO PRIOR TO EXPLOITATION









Northwestern Colorado includes the area extending west from the Continental Divide to the Utah-Colorado state line, and from about the Colorado River northward to the Wyoming-Colorado state line. Within this area lie a succession of wide valleys, several high mountain parks, and a series of major river drainages.

Farther west, Colorado is composed of broad floodplains on either side of the major rivers, and within the main drainage areas, smaller creeks and streams cut the landscape into massive buttes and narrow canyons. This region is well watered by numerous subsidiary creeks running into the Yampa or Colorado Rivers. One of the major features of the far northwestern corner is a valley, Brown's Park, extending sixty miles into Utah from the Maybell, Colorado area on a northwest axis.

The major river drainages include the Colorado (Grand) River, which begins at Grand Lake and is fed by the Fraser, the Blue, and the Eagle Rivers. North Park, one of the smaller valleys, is drained by the North Platte River and smaller streams and creeks, such as the Michigan, the Illinois and the Canadian. The Yampa Valley's major river is the Yampa (Bear) and it is fed by the Little Snake and the Elk Rivers as well as smaller creeks, like Fortification. The White River Valley is fed by Piceance Creek, Douglas Creek, and numerous other small streams.



The area's climate is extreme. From the summer months when the temperature can exceed 100 degrees in the far northwestern corner, to the winter months in the mountain parks where the thermometer has recorded 54 degrees below zero, radical variations make agriculture and development difficult.<sup>1</sup> Generally, the mountain parks remain wet from May until July, while the lower areas are dry by late June. This climate, plus the fluctuating seasonal water sources, mainly run-off from snowfall, make agriculture a limited and risky business.

To fully understand the geography of Northwestern Colorado, it is important to know what geologic events have transpired to modify the landscape. The base material upon which the area is built is Pre-Cambrian rock that was eroded into vast layers of flat sediment. These layers were then uplifted and re-eroded so that a series of sediments have been left over a period of millions of years.<sup>2</sup> Most of the sedimentation of the region and new layers of sandstone were laid down. Almost perfect fossil examples of marine life can be found.<sup>3</sup>

Late in the Jurassic Period, Colorado was submerged. During this moist environment, the dinosaur bones that are found in Dinosaur National Monument were deposited. Plant and marine life began to provide fossil remains that became the coal and oil deposits that cover this region.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Payne, *Where the Rockies Ride Herd*, (Denver: Sage Books, 1965), p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> See William W. Mallory, *Geologic Atlas of the Rocky Mountain Region*, (Denver: Rocky Mountain Association of Petroleum Geologists, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> Linda L. Duchrow, *"Geologic History of Colorado"*, (Typescript, University of Colorado at Denver, 1974), p. 8.



During the Cretaceous Period the land was uplifted and the Piceance and Axial Basins were created. Underlying these basins were the oil and coal deposits left by organic matter buried in the region.<sup>4</sup>

The Tertiary Period of the Cenozoic Era saw a period of mountain building called the Laramide Orogeny. The Rocky Mountains, as we know them, were uplifted. The core of the uplift was cracked and brought to the surface, where solutions of gold, silver, zinc, lead, copper and iron seeped into the fissures. This created the veins of gold that are common in the Colorado Rockies. Localized deposits were also created by this uplift, including areas such as Hahn's Peak and Independence Mountain. Additionally, an oily material called Kerogen was formed from the mud of Lake Uintah, which had developed with the Laramie uplift, and from these deposits came the Green River formation of oil shales.

The final building period came in the Quaternary Period when the Ice Age descended on Colorado. During the Pleistocene Epoch, the state was selectively glaciated, and many of the features that we know today were created. To some extent the parks, Middle and North, were carved out, while the mountains including the Rockies, the Park Range and the Elk Mountains were gouged out. Terminal moraines were dropped from glaciers and these formed dams across valleys; from these formations came lakes such as Grand Lake.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Nevin M. Fenneman, *The Yampa Coal Fields, Routt County, Colorado*, (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1906).

<sup>5</sup> See Ferdinand V. Hayden, *United States Geologic Survey of the Territories*, Annual Report, 1875 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1875). Gustavus R. Beckler describes Middle Park geology in this report.



Recent geologic events have created the land-forms that are currently known. These are a result of natural erosion by wind and water, along with geologic changes wrought by massive slides and other factors. Manmade features have created the most recent changes in the landscape. Such physical evidence as mines, foundations, road alignments and other changes are the more recent and possibly most radical variations on the land since the Ice Age. Man's use and occupation of the land is clearly evident in the changes he has wrought.

The advent of humans in the area is difficult to date. Man probably had used the land for 10,000 years or more prior to the coming of the Europeans. However, it is historic native Indians which are of interest as factors in the settlement and development of the area. Prior to the coming of Europeans, the northwest corner of the state was populated basically by three tribes of Indians. Of these groups, the largest was probably the Ute. The next most important tribe in the area was the Arapaho who, while plains natives, often used North and Middle Parks for summer hunting grounds. These were traditionally Ute lands, and conflicts often erupted over hunting rights. However, the Arapaho continued to use the near western areas despite Ute objections. The other tribe of consequence in the area was the Shoshoni, who were said to have come into the Brown's Park area to winter. These people were probably the Wind River Shoshoni and were of the same linguistic group as the Ute. In this way they were able to exist with the Ute and there was rarely trouble between these peoples. Other tribes that had a minor impact on the area included the Cheyenne, the Navajo, and to some extent, the Apache.



Within the Ute tribe there were subdivisions including Uintah, Wimonuntici, Mowatavi-watsiu, Mowatri, Kopata, and others. These subdivisions related primarily to geographic locations and not major cultural differences. The Uintah Ute were the main inhabitants of northwestern Colorado. These people were nomadic hunters who used the river valleys for shelter. They summered in the high mountain parks stocked with abundant game, particularly elk, deer, and beaver, and when the weather turned cold, they moved into the Yampa or White River valleys to spend the winter in comfort. The Ute were not known as hostile to whites at the time Europeans first described them. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Ute were continually at war with the Arapaho, the Comanche, and other plains tribes. However, once the Uintah had moved into the mountainous interior, the constant warfare eased. They were friendly to whites, and their only real enemies during the period of early European occupation were the plains war parties and Arapaho who occasionally encroached the Ute lands.

The Ute tended to live in small family groups scattered over wide areas, yet they retained a certain cohesion in times of trouble.<sup>6</sup> The Ute culture was changed radically by the introduction of the horse; once adapted, the horse was looked upon as a sacred animal. It was Ute wealth, and it was valued possibly more than a wife, children, or a dog.<sup>7</sup> Thanks to the horse, which the Ute had by the 1680's, his geographic range was considerably extended; due to new and better available food,

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<sup>6</sup> Marshall Sprague, *Massacre: The Tragedy at White River*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1957), p. 62. Sprague is a journalist whose history and anthropology should be used with care.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63.



the Ute advanced considerably in status among the natives of the West.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, the Ute culture developed into a buckskin-horse-buffalo economy, with the Plains Indians making a strong contribution to Ute materialism. The Ute expanded to the point that by the time Europeans came into their land, they ranged from Pike's Peak on the east to the Great Salt Lake on the west, and from Taos in the south, to Wyoming Green River country on the north.<sup>9</sup>

The first known European visitors to northwestern Colorado were Spanish, in 1776. The Spanish were not new to the general area of Colorado; as early as 1695 Diego de Vargas, the re-conquerer of New Mexico, had visited the San Luis Valley. Colorado was of little interest to the Spanish, however, for it showed little agricultural promise, and no precious minerals were found. In 1765, Juan de Rivera was sent out from Santa Fe to explore for minerals in Colorado. He reached the area of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison and also explored the San Juan region. Finding nothing of value, he returned home and reported that the area was of little worth. This ended interest in Colorado until 1776.<sup>10</sup>

In that year, the Spanish government of New Mexico decided to explore for new routes to California from Santa Fe. The reason for the decision to go north was that the Hopi (Moqui) had blocked the most direct route across Arizona, and the Spanish, particularly the Church,

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<sup>8</sup> Warren L. d'Azevedo, et al, (eds.), *The Current Status of Anthropological Research in the Great Basin: 1964*. (Reno, Nevada: Desert Research Institute, 1966), p. 173.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 178

<sup>10</sup> Herbert E. Bolton, *Pageant in the Wilderness*, (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah State Historical Society, 1950), p. 6



were interested in establishing relations with the new California settlements.<sup>11</sup> There was a trader's trail into Colorado which had been used since the Rivera expedition. It was upon this path that two Franciscan explorers led their small expedition. These men, Fray Silvestre Vélez de Escalante and Fray Francisco Atanasio Domínguez, were determined to trace a new route to California. They projected that this could be done with minimum cost and without a large party.<sup>12</sup>

The Spanish governor at Santa Fe was interested in the project, and he willingly helped the two friars arrange for their trip. Governor Fermín de Mendinueta provided material help and saw the expedition off on July 29, 1776. The little party of ten left Santa Fe and worked its way up to Abiquiú (New Mexico), from whence the group pushed north into Colorado. By August, 1776, they were well into the present state of Colorado. They passed Dulce, and then moved to the San Juan River, past Mesa Verde, to the Dolores River.<sup>13</sup>

From the Dolores, the party moved to the Uncompahgre River where it meets the Gunnison River. They crossed the stream with the help of "Yuta" Indians. The party then moved northward toward the Green River. In doing so, they became the first Europeans to have crossed the Grand Hogback, the Colorado River, and the Piceance Basin. By September, 1776, they were moving into the Grand Valley.

On September 5, 1776, the group had reached the Debeque, Colorado area, from whence they trailed north along Roan Creek. The

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

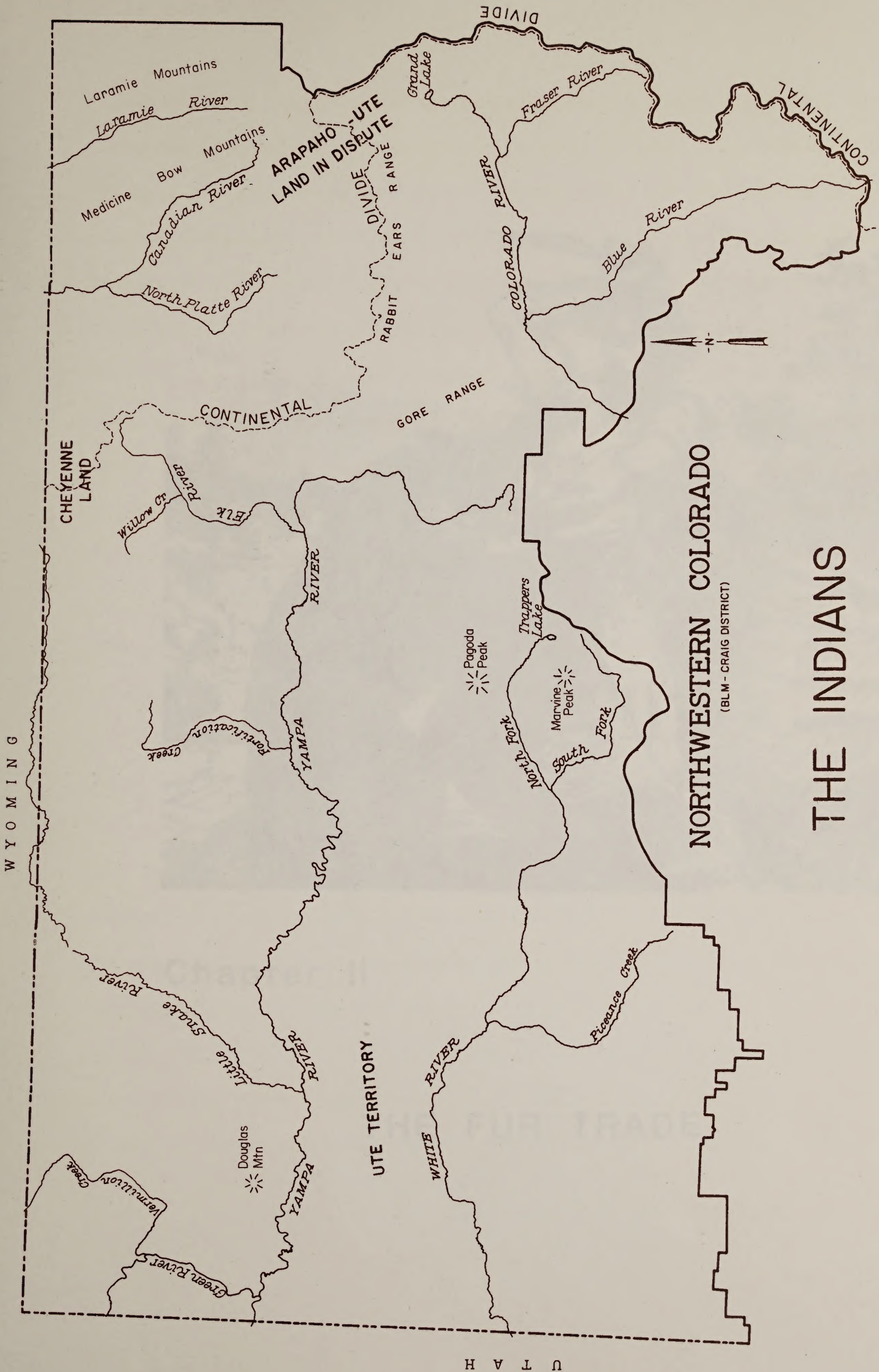


party left Roan Creek, travelled along the Roan Plateau and came to the headwaters of Douglas Creek. From here they proceeded through Douglas Canyon into the White River country. Along the way, they saw the Cañon Pintado (Painted Canyon) and what they thought were veins of gold along the canyon walls.<sup>14</sup> However, they made no attempt to mine. Upon emerging from the Douglas Canyon area, the group moved down the White River Valley into Utah. They camped at Jensen, Utah, on September 14, 1776, and then proceeded southwest across that state and into Arizona, finally returning to Santa Fe without having found a route to California. The knowledge gained from the expedition was not widely distributed and many of the areas that had been explored for the first time remained "undiscovered". The Domínguez-Escalante expedition was of some value in that the resources of the Great Basin area were explored. However, the Spanish were not interested in taking advantage of these discoveries, and it was not for another forty years that Mexicans and Americans would venture far into this land.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-58.





# NORTHWESTERN COLORADO

(BLM - CRAIG DISTRICT)

## THE INDIANS

### MAP I









## Chapter II

# THE FUR TRADE







The fur trade in Colorado was not developed until the early 1820's, although some fur trappers were active in the area prior to that time. The Hudson's Bay Company had been continually working the northern and central Rockies and western Canada for nearly one hundred years after their charter had been granted in the mid-1700's. The fur trade boomed during the early 1800's when European demand for pelts suddenly rose. In London, Berlin, Paris, Rome and St. Petersburg the demand for furs for coats, robes and hats rose dramatically. This caused North American fur seekers to expand their areas of trapping and trade.

At the same time, the Americans were coming on the scene. In 1810 the upper Missouri River basin was swarming with American and British trappers. By 1808, the Yellowstone River country was being trapped, and by 1810 the first American company was founded. Manuel Lisa, William Clark (of Lewis and Clark), and the Chouteau brothers of St. Louis founded the Missouri Fur Company which dominated the trade until 1814, when John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company surpassed it. The companies dealt mainly with private trappers scattered all over the west. By 1819 the northwest corner of Colorado was exploited by half-breed French trappers who worked for whoever paid the best price.<sup>1</sup>

Several trappers were noted as having been in the Green-Yampa (Bear) River areas of Colorado prior to 1822. Jean-Baptiste Chalifoux, otherwise known as Baptiste Brown, was in the area as early as 1820.

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<sup>1</sup> Ray, A. Billington, *Westward Expansion*, (New York: Macmillian 1974) pp. 379-389.



He discovered the long valley of the Green which was subsequently named after him, Brown's Hole.<sup>2</sup> However, despite Baptiste Brown's knowledge of the area, there was little activity in the Hole. Possibly scattered trappers used it for wintering purposes, but little else. It was nearly twenty years later that Brown's Hole became a popular fur trade center. The only other early trapper known to be in the "Hole" was Maurice Le Duc, who claimed he had come in by 1819 or 1820.<sup>3</sup> Off and on, trappers made their way into the "Hole", but it was William Ashley who opened the area on a large scale.

In 1822 "General" Ashley advertised in a St. Louis newspaper that he needed one hundred "enterprising young men" to form a trading party he called the "company of adventurers," to exploit the Missouri River Basin. Before Ashley was finished, he had 180 recruits including most of the well-known trappers of the fur trade, such as Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Milton and William Sublette, Jedediah Smith, and many others. His first expedition up the Missouri River was a financial disaster and he quickly shifted his operations to the Central Rockies. He sent Jedediah Smith with a small party into the Rockies to test the beaver potential, and when Thomas Fitzpatrick returned to St. Louis in June, 1823, every pack horse was laden with fur. Ashley knew he had won.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> LeRoy R. Hafen (ed.), *The Mountain Men and The Fur Trade of the Far West*, (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark, 1966), VII, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> F. W. Cragin Papers, Manuscripts, Pioneers Museum, Colorado Springs, Colorado, Notebook IV, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> David M. Frost, *Notes on General Ashley*, (Barre, Mass.: Barre Gazette, 1960), p. 12



The Ashley party then set out in 1824 to exploit this new area of the Rockies. In his journey of discovery, Ashley found his way across Wyoming down into the Yampa Valley where he viewed the Steamboat Springs, and noted the Brown's Hole area. From the Green River, he went north until he found a place for a rendezvous with his men;<sup>5</sup> the spot was Pierre's Hole, along the Green River. Ashley decided that it was safer not to build permanent forts among the Indians, but rather to use a system of annual "rendezvous" which would assure a steady supply of furs ready for shipment back to St. Louis. In 1825, a caravan set out for St. Louis and with it went Ashley, now a rich man. He and his partners sold out to Thomas Fitzpatrick, Milton Sublette, and Jim Bridger, who then formed the Rocky Mountain Fur Company in 1830.<sup>6</sup>

Naturally, the success of Ashley tempted others to try their luck in the field. In 1825, a party organized by Alexander Sinclair and Robert Bean moved into the North Park area to trap. They wintered at Brown's Hole and then returned to St. Louis.<sup>7</sup> This marked the first serious competition for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company in Colorado. From that year on, Brown's Hole became a regular stopping point for most fur trappers. With the coming of the Sinclair-Bean party, other men came into North, Middle and Brown's Parks. Antoine Robidoux visited Brown's Park in 1825, but built a trading post in 1828 on the Gunnison River at

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<sup>5</sup> Dale L. Morgan (ed.), *The West of William H. Ashley*, (Denver: Old West Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 272-273.

<sup>6</sup> Billington, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

<sup>7</sup> Hafen, *op. cit.*, III, p. 340.



its junction with the Uncompahgre. He later built a fort in Utah in the early 1830's near the White Rocks Agency (see diagram, page 16), which he named Fort Uintah. It was also called Fort "Winty" or Fort Robidoux, and became a major trading post for the Yampa (Bear) River area. During his visits in the region, Robidoux also worked along the White River. His men were probably the first Europeans to have worked from Trappers Lake along the White River. The area was in use as early as 1824 or 1825 and continued to be a major fur source into the 1840's. Robidoux and his men ranged from the Flattop Mountains to the Utah border and were probably the first white visitors to the Rangely, Colorado country.

Other trappers made their way into North Park which was abundant with game. Thomas "Peg-Leg" Smith (so-called because he lost a leg when Milton Sublette was forced to amputate it due to gangrene), John Gantt, Christopher (Kit) Carson, Alexander Sinclair and Calvin Jones were all known to frequent North Park and Middle Park until the late 1830's.<sup>8</sup> Albert Gallatin Boone hunted in Middle Park as early as 1824-1825. He had moved to the Williams Fork River by the 1830's where he worked with William S. (Old Bill) Williams. Williams had trapped the Bear River area as early as 1825.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hafen, *op. cit.*, IV. p. 357; V. 197; VI. p. 208; IV, p. 301.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 34 and VIII, p. 373: VIII, p. 376



# FORT ROBIDOUX

Length West side

50'-0"  
39'-1½"  
89'-1½"  
1-6  
90"-7½"

Length East Side

50'-0"  
39'-6"  
89'-0"  
1'-0"  
90' 6"

Width North end

50'-0"  
24'-9"  
74'-9"  
1'-6"  
76"-3"

Width South end

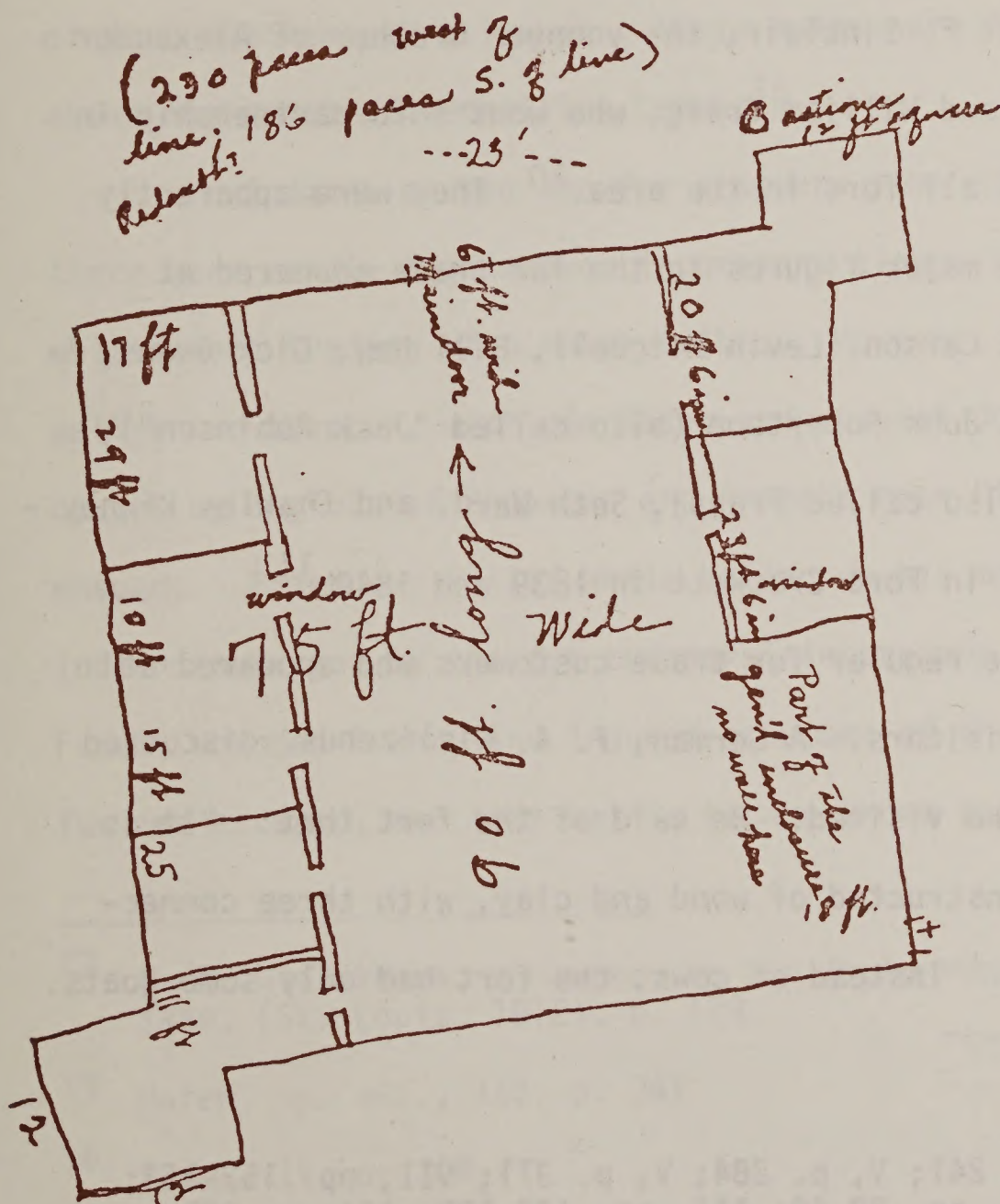
50'-0"  
22'-0"  
72'-0"  
1'-6"  
73'-6"

76-¼  
73-½  
1-½

74 3½=4  
(30)

Manuscript of F. W. Cragin and Mr. J. M. Barker, September 3, 1902

## Ft. Robidoux



walls massive, of adobe:  
(no sod on the valley  
here; all clay-loam.  
At x a dirt ridge runs  
out east to the S. wall  
and flush with it as if  
a small tower or bastion  
had fallen there; it's  
only about 4 feet wide.

From: Original drawing in F. W. Cragin Manuscripts, Colorado Springs, Colo.



While northwestern Colorado was being extensively used for trapping purposes as early as 1825, Brown's Hole was not developed until the late 1830's. It was the construction of Fort Davy Crockett to service the fur trade in 1838 or 1839 that brought Brown's Hole to the forefront. Furs trapped in New Park (North Park) were often brought to Fort Crockett for trading purposes. The Fort served as protection for the trappers against the Indians who generally confined themselves to stealing horses. Many trappers also wintered in Brown's Hole.

By 1839, Fort Crockett was in full operation. The guiding lights behind the Fort were Prewett F. Sinclair, the younger brother of Alexander Sinclair, Philip Thompson, and William Craig, who went into partnership in 1837 to try to buy and sell all furs in the area.<sup>10</sup> They were apparently successful, for most of the major figures in the fur trade appeared at Fort Crockett. In 1839 Kit Carson, Levin Mitchell, Bill New, Dick Owens, Joseph Walker, Tim Goodale, John Robertson (also called "Jack Robinson"), James Baker, Henry Fraeb (also called Frapp), Seth Ward, and Charles Kinney - all were known to have been in Fort Crockett in 1839 and 1840.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the regular fur trade customers who appeared at Fort Crockett, there were visitors. A German, F. A. Wislizenus, discussed Fort Crockett in 1839 when he visited. He said of the fort that: "It is a low one-story building constructed of wood and clay, with three connecting wings and no enclosure. Instead of cows, the fort had only some goats.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, p. 306.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, V, p. 241; V, p. 241; V, p. 284; V, p. 371; VII, pp. 152-153; VII, p. 250; III, pp. 39-40; III, pp. 137-139; III, p. 361; and IV, p. 264.



In short, the whole establishment appeared somewhat poverty stricken, for which reason it is also known to the trappers by the name of Fort Misery".<sup>12</sup> Thomas Jefferson Farnham also visited the fort and had little good to say about it. Obadiah Oakley and E. Willard Smith visited the area and described the fort as being miserable in appearance.<sup>13</sup> When John Charles Fremont passed by the area in 1844, he found the fort abandoned with only a few walls standing.<sup>14</sup> By 1844, the fur trade was no longer profitable in the area, and Fort Crockett had been abandoned. In 1866, all that remained of Fort Crockett was an old building a corral, and the ruins of some cobblestone chimneys. These ruins were located about two miles above the mouth of Vermillion Creek.<sup>15</sup>

Indians caused the fur trappers some moments of anxiety, but there were rarely fights over incursions along, due to the fact that the whites were trading with enemy tribes. However, in 1841, Henry Fraeb, a well-known trapper, with Jim Baker and several dozen other trappers, were caught by a group of Cheyenne and Arapaho near Dixon, Wyoming, and battle ensued. Fraeb was killed while holing up his men in some rocks. Several Indians outraged by the fur trappers' incursions into Wyoming, killed Fraeb, wounded Baker, and injured a number of the other trappers. The fur men escaped, and this battle became known as the largest single

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<sup>12</sup> F. A. Wislizenus, *A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839*, (St. Louis: 1912), p. 129.

<sup>13</sup> Hafen, *op. cit.*, III, p. 341

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, p. 309

<sup>15</sup> Cragin Papers, *op. cit.*, not paginated.



battle between Indians and fur trappers in Colorado history. The location of this fight has been designated as Battle Mountain, Battle Creek, and Fraeb was buried near Savery Creek.<sup>16</sup>

The main fur trade in northwest Colorado came to an end in the 1840's. There were two basic causes for the decline. The first, and most obvious, was the lack of beaver pelts; most prime pelts had been trapped out. Second, a major change in fashion caused fur to lose popularity. The silk hat came into style in Europe, and soon fur pelt hats were no longer in demand.

In northwest Colorado there were a few trappers who refused to quit. Lory (Lowry) Simmons was trapping in Brown's Hole as late as the 1870's, while Gus Lankin was said to have been making his living trapping in Brown's Hole as late as 1878. He had a cabin located somewhere on Diamond Mountain, and was considered the last of the trappers.<sup>17</sup>

Other fur men found new employment. Jim Bridger, Charles Kinney, Bill Sublette, Jim Baker, Jack Robinson, and Tim Goodale all ran immigrant ferries on the Green River in Wyoming. Bridger sold his operation in 1859 and turned to scouting.<sup>18</sup> Tim Goodale was employed by Captain E. L. Berthoud in 1861 to guide him across the pass later named for the Captain, while Jim Baker was hired to guide Sir St. George Gore into North Park for his famous "hunt" of 1855.<sup>19</sup> He moved back along the Little Snake River

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<sup>16</sup> Hafen, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 137-139

<sup>17</sup> Hafen, *op. cit.*, V, p 322 and V, pp. 322-323

<sup>18</sup> Cragin Papers, *op. cit.*, Notebook V, p. 2, Note 6 and Note 7.

<sup>19</sup> Hafen, *op. cit.*, VII, pp. 152-153; and Forbes Parkhill, *The Wildest of the West*, (Denver, Sage, 1957), pp. 133-134.



in 1878 where he farmed until 1898, the year of his death; he was buried at Dixon, Wyoming.<sup>20</sup> Seth Ward left the fur trade, and through his connections became the post sutler at Fort Laramie, Wyoming. Here he made a fortune selling goods to the army, and died peacefully in 1903.<sup>21</sup> Kit Carson went on to become active in New Mexican politics, and when the United States took over New Mexico in 1846, Carson was appointed Lieutenant-Governor.<sup>22</sup> Rufus B. Sage, who came to North Park in 1841, turned to a literary career and published his journals.<sup>23</sup>

Most of the fur trappers who were active in Colorado during the 1820's and 1830's had moved on by 1845. Many went south into New Mexico where a booming trade in furs was taking place. Some went into California where there were still opportunities in beaver, otter, and other pelts, not to mention a rich Mexican-American trade. The Colorado trappers took what they had come for, and then left when the resources were exhausted.

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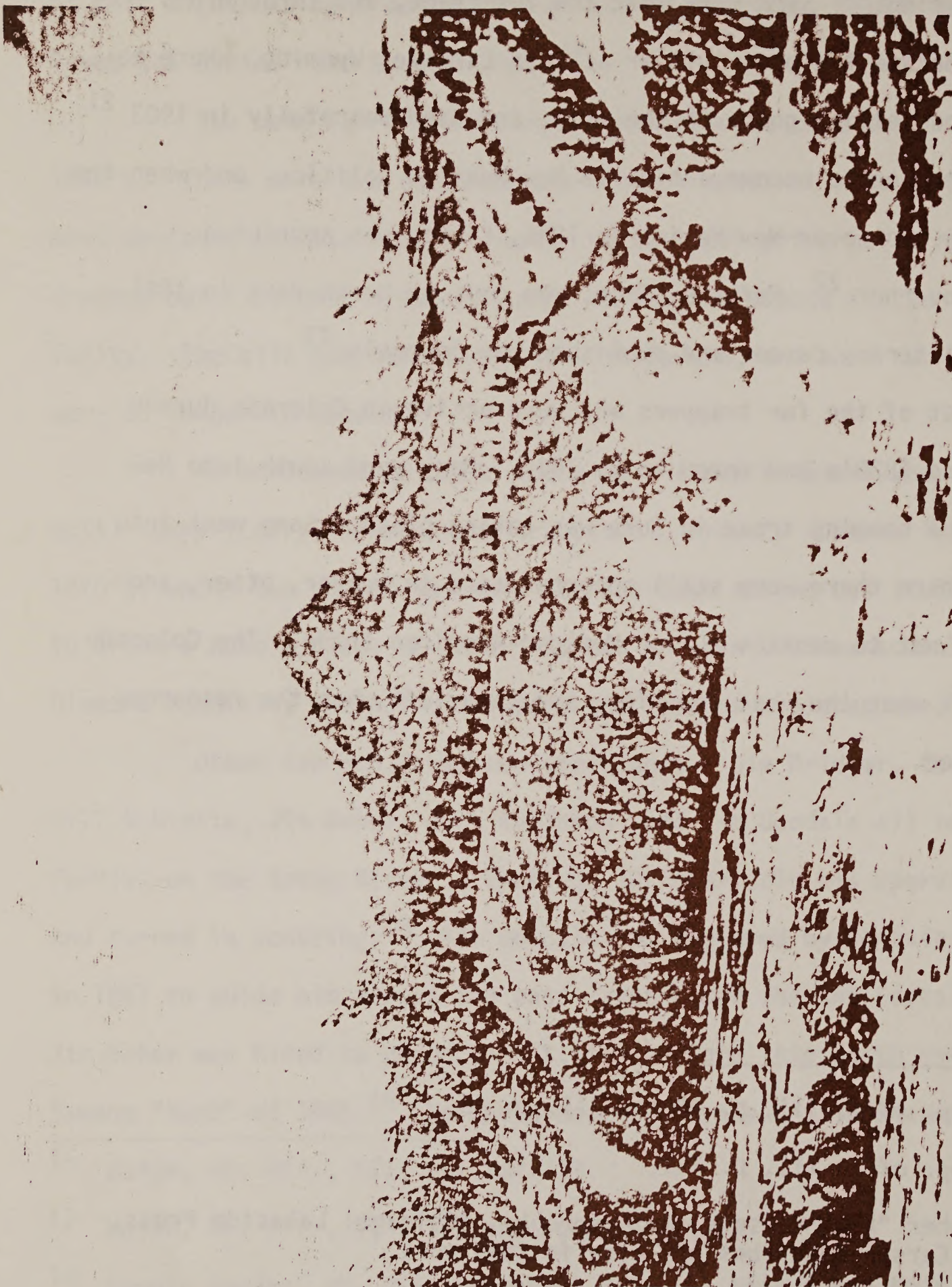
<sup>20</sup> Hafen, *op. cit.*, III, p. 40 and III, p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> Hafen, *op. cit.*, III, p. 361

<sup>22</sup> Christopher "Kit" Carson, *Autobiography*, (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1935). Carson describes his life in this work.

<sup>23</sup> Rufus B. Sage, *His Letters and His Papers*, (Glendale, California, A. H. Clark, 1956).

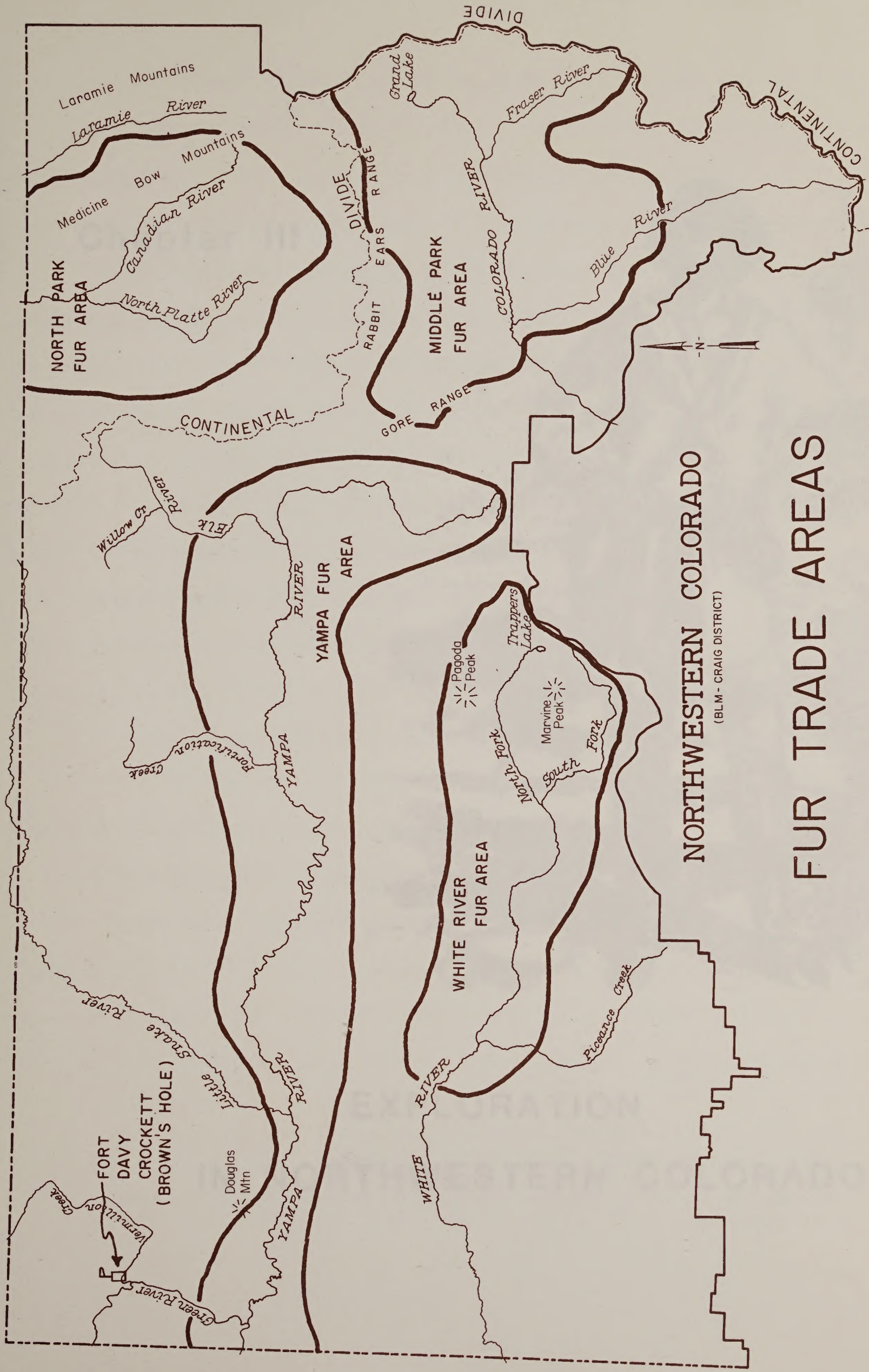




When the trappers came to northwest Colorado, they found hot springs, one of which they called Steamboat. From: C. P. Westermeyer, *Colorado's First Portrait*.  
*Courtesy University of New Mexico Press.*



W Y O M I N G



NORTHWESTERN COLORADO

(BLM - CRAIG DISTRICT)

FUR TRADE AREAS

— FUR AREA BOUNDARIES

MAP 2







## Chapter III



# EXPLORATION IN NORTHWESTERN COLORADO



Exploration by America in the far west began after Louisiana was purchased by the United States in 1803. With this acquisition, millions of acres of unexplored land was added to the nation. As a result, a series of expeditions and surveys were ordered by the government, beginning with Lewis and Clark, and not ending until 1876. The purpose of the survey efforts was to map the land and to provide basic information on the resources, native inhabitants, and the flora and fauna of these vast new areas; their suitability for settlement was to be determined. Usefulness of the land was uppermost in the minds of most Americans at the time, and for this reason, the surveys were conducted at government expense, for public purposes. To insure that exploration of the west was accomplished, the United States government assigned the task to the U. S. Army. Within the Army, the Topographical Engineers were given the job of actual exploration.<sup>1</sup>

One of the visitors to the northwest corner of Colorado included Captain Benjamin L. E. Bonneville, who explored the Great Basin in 1826, and again in 1832, but did little to improve knowledge of Colorado. Besides official government explorers, there were other travellers in the west. Several parties of men interested in the west made long, hard treks into the wilderness. One such group was the Thomas Jefferson Farnham

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<sup>1</sup> See William H. Goetzmann, *Army Explorations in the American West, 1803-1863*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1959.

<sup>2</sup> LeRoy R. Hafen, *Colorado and Its People*, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1948). p. 89.



party of adventurers who took the Santa Fe Trail to Bent's Fort, from which they went northwest to the Blue River country, crossing the Continental Divide into Middle Park and then moving west into the Yampa (Bear) Valley. Once on the Yampa, the party went to Fort Davy Crockett in August of 1839, where Farnham described his stay. On the way to Crockett, the Farnham party observed Steamboat Springs, and crossed the country near the Little Snake River, which he noted was quite dry and useless. Brown's Park was described as a virtual paradise after the Little Snake area.<sup>3</sup> Farnham noted that the Brown's Park Valley was rich and could be used for agriculture; he said that some vegetables were being grown there for the fort's consumption.<sup>4</sup> Upon leaving the fort, the party went up the Green River and then on to Oregon, their final destination.

In an area where there were few white men, Farnham and his group met the party led by F. A. Wislizenus of St. Louis. The two groups compared notes and then parted. Farnham's descriptions of Fort Crockett were glowing, while Wislizenus found it a miserable place. The two had taken different routes, and Wislizenus' was far easier; perhaps that is why he tended to be critical of the fort.

Another private traveller, E. Willard Smith, visited Brown's Park in April, 1840, and noted that Fort Crockett was still active.

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<sup>3</sup> Reuben G. Thwaites, *Travels in the Far West*, (Cleveland: Arthur W. Clark, 1906), 2 Vols., p. 244 and p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>5</sup> F. A. Wislizenus, *A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839*, (St. Louis, n.p. 1912). p. 129.



Smith also hunted in North Park, but he proceeded to the West Coast without having provided much information about far western Colorado.<sup>6</sup>

In 1843, the first of two major army expeditions to map and survey the west was begun. John Charles Frémont was ordered to blaze trails into Oregon and California, and in general to discover practical routes for settlement of the west. To do this, Frémont was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Corps of Topographic Engineers. His second expedition in 1844 took him into Colorado.

Guided by Thomas "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick, Frémont took a party from Fort St. Vrain in eastern Colorado to the Laramie Mountains via the Cache la Poudre River, and then from North Park into the Green River country along the Yampa Valley. Charles Preuss, the expedition's scientist, made observations of altitude, longitude and latitude, and took notes on the flora and fauna of the region.<sup>7</sup> The Frémont expedition stopped at Steamboat Springs, which they named.<sup>8</sup> The expedition then moved on to the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

Upon reaching Salt Lake, the party turned around and marched back to the Uintah country, where they visited Antoine Robidoux at his fort (Fort Uintah), which was wiped out by Indians only a few weeks after Frémont's visit.<sup>9</sup> From here Frémont moved into Brown's Hole,

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<sup>6</sup> LeRoy R. Hafen, "With Fur Traders in Colorado, 1839-1840: The Journal of E. Willard Smith", *Colorado Magazine*, Vol. 27, Number 3, July, 1950, pp. 161-188.

<sup>7</sup> Goetzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 86 and 87. See also: Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence, *The Expedition of John Charles Frémont*, (Urbana Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 2 Volumes and Maps.

<sup>8</sup> Jackson and Spence, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

<sup>9</sup> Goetzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 101



finding the remains of Fort Crockett. The group then marched to Vermillion Creek, then to the St. Vrain Area which took them back to the Platte; from there they returned to St. Louis, down the Platte and Missouri Valleys.<sup>10</sup>

Fremont's observations of the country in western Colorado were typical. He found North Park and the Yampa Valley abundant in game. He saw little use for the land west of the present Craig area, and he felt that Brown's Hole was of marginal value. He noted the constant outcroppings of coal, and he was interested in the numerous springs and mineral waters that were found in the region.<sup>11</sup> Other than these observations, the second Fremont expedition did little to improve knowledge of this region.

In 1845 Fremont was commissioned to explore Colorado in preparation for possible war with Mexico. Relations between the United States and Mexico had been poor since the proposed annexation of Texas. Some popular sentiment in the nation demanded war. The Army was aware of this and tried to prepare; they needed routes for invasion and sent out Fremont to find them. His third expedition was for military purposes only.

This third expedition was guided by Kit Carson, and took Fremont up the Arkansas River to Tennessee Pass over which his party crossed into the Grand (Colorado) River Valley. They then turned north and reached the White River. From here they marched west down the White River until they joined the Green River. From the Green, they moved

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101-103

<sup>12</sup> Jackson and Spence, *op. cit.*, p. 470. See also Allan Nevins (ed). *Narratives of Exploration and Adventure by John Charles Fremont*, (New York: Longmans, Green, 1956),



west across Utah and Nevada into California.<sup>12</sup> His journals make little mention of Colorado; this was understandable in that there was little interest in science on this trip. The area was crudely mapped and then forgotten; California was of more interest.

Fremont's contribution of knowledge of the west cannot be underestimated; through his mapping and descriptions of the land, the public as well as the government learned what was there. Western Colorado was written off as "worthless". A major event in the region was needed to re-stimulate interest.

The needed stimulus came in 1859 with the discovery of gold along Cherry Creek near Denver. The Russell Brothers from Georgia found a little of the precious metal in placers along this waterway, and through continual "booming" by eastern and mid-western newspapers, a gold rush began in Colorado. The Pikes Peak Boom brought an estimated 100,000 people to Colorado. Soon it was evident that free gold along the creeks was not going to be enough. As miners worked their ways up the various creeks along the Front Range, Clear Creek proved to be the best. By 1861, the towns of Central City, Georgetown, and Empire were booming mining camps, and settlement was projected in Middle Park. William Byers, editor and owner of the Rocky Mountain News, bought Hot Sulphur Springs in 1861, and planned to turn it into a tourist resort. However, before that could happen an access road was needed.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Goetzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 119

<sup>13</sup> Louise C. Harrison, *Empire and the Berthoud Pass*, (Denver: Big Mountain Press, 1964), p. 203.



At Empire, with the urging of Byers, the citizens decided it would be wise to provide a road into Middle Park, using Empire as the starting point. A Swiss engineer named Edward L. Berthoud was hired to blaze a trail over the mountains. Guided by ex-trapper Tim Goodale, Berthoud and his party left Empire May 10, 1861, and traced a route over a logical pass in the Rockies. It took the group seventeen days to cross the Divide.<sup>14</sup> They concluded that this route would require 111½ miles of roadway from Golden City (Golden, Colorado) to Hot Sulphur Springs. The cost was projected at \$18,040; Berthoud concluded that such a road was possible.<sup>15</sup> However, due to a singular lack of traffic into Middle Park, the wagon road that was built was barely passable, and rarely used. Byers was unable to stir interest in it, and it was not until the 1870's that a new and better road was finally constructed. Berthoud's expedition was important in providing a passage over the Divide; the opening of Middle Park.

Berthoud later blazed a trail across western Colorado, using the White River Valley, and across the Green to Salt Lake. Jim Bridger was his guide, but nothing came of the effort. The Army was called in to provide railway surveys in the 1850's, and the John Gunnison survey of Colorado provided information about the Gunnison River country. This was the last official effort until the late 1860's when a new survey was made in northwestern Colorado.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-61.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60



John Wesley Powell was chosen for the job of surveying the White River country, northwestern Colorado, and the Green River. This awesome task was begun in 1868 when Powell started preliminary work. He gathered a party of men at Fort Bridger, Wyoming, and then marched them down to the White River. Here, near the present site of Meeker, Colorado, he found a small park, where he wintered. Powell Park was west of the White River Indian Agency founded in 1868.<sup>16</sup>

Powell, having successfully wintered in Powell Park, prepared to leave in the spring of 1869. His plan was to survey the Green River, stopping to take latitude and longitude readings, in addition to providing basic mapping of the area. This rugged river had never been fully explored before, although some fur trappers including Jim Bridger claimed they had boated part-way down the Green. Powell's crew included only nine men in three specially designed wooden boats. By the time the party reached the junction of the Green and Yampa Rivers, they had lost one boat and considerable quantities of supplies. They passed through Flaming Gorge and into the Canyon of Lodore (near Brown's Hole). Powell's men continued down the Green River to the Colorado River where they went into the Grand Canyon, reaching Collville, Utah, during the summer of 1869.<sup>17</sup>

The Powell survey of 1869 provided new and more accurate information on northwestern Colorado. The area was described by Powell as being of marginal quality for agriculture, and he concluded that the only

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Bartlett, *Great Surveys of the American West*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 235.

<sup>17</sup> William K. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, (New York: Knopf, 1963) p. 517. The boats were named: "Kitty Clyde's Sister", "Maid of the River", and "The Emma Dean".



way to make it work was to irrigate on a massive basis.<sup>18</sup> However, Powell noted that there was not enough water available for that effort. He described Brown's Park: "...natural meadow lands are found interspersed with the fine groves of cottonwood". He also noted that: "Some of the bench lands are well adapted to irrigation, but a portion of them and the foothills back of them are naked, valueless bad lands".<sup>19</sup> He estimated that there were only ten square miles of irrigable land in Brown's Park.<sup>20</sup>

The Powell survey included valuable information on the condition of lands in the far west. Powell felt that this land was indeed not suited for agriculture, and he did not see it for cattle land. Nonetheless, Powell's main objective of tracing the Green and Colorado Rivers was achieved, and it would be up to another to finish exploration in western Colorado.

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<sup>18</sup> John W. Powell, *U. S. Public Lands Commission*, (Washington: Government Printing Office 1879), pp. 160-165.

<sup>19</sup> Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.







## Chapter IV

# MINING AND TRANSPORTATION IN EARLY WESTERN COLORADO









Gold! The magic mineral that brought thousands of seekers to Colorado promoted this state's first boom. As the miners worked their way up the canyons and gullies, they discovered "free" gold in placers. This meant that along watercourses, flakes of gold were abundant and could be panned or sluiced. However, the major sources of gold were locked in hardrock quartzite which required milling. Hence, early miners confined themselves to the creeks and rivers.

As the surge of civilization swept against the Rockies, miners passed over the Divide and found that the Blue and Eagle River areas were rich in gold placers. In 1859, one of the first major mining towns on the western slope was founded. This was Breckenridge, named after John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, a leading American politician. However, his name was somehow misspelled and the incorrect spelling has persisted.<sup>1</sup> By 1860 various gulches along the Blue River were being placer mined, and a few hard rock shafts had been sunk. In 1861 the population of the district was over 5,000, and other mining camp towns arose.<sup>2</sup>

During the early 1860's, hundreds of men fanned out over the Colorado Rockies, filtered into the parks, and then worked into the far west. Among these men were Joseph Hahn, a German immigrant, William Doyle and George Way. Hahn wandered into the Elk River area in the early 1860's

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Fiester, *Blasted, Beloved Breckenridge*. (Boulder: Pruett Press, 1973), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-157.



and discovered that placer gold was available,<sup>3</sup> but he was unable to develop his discovery until after the Civil War. In 1865 he took in Way and Doyle as partners, and the little group moved to Hahn's Peak. Doyle reported: "We found gold on every side of the peak, but not in sufficient quantities to pay for work with the pan, which was the only means we had of washing it out."<sup>4</sup> When the fall of 1865 came, the men quit the area for the winter. In 1866, they guided some fifty men into Hahn's Peak area and began serious mining operations. They found the rich yields running from ten dollars to fifteen dollars per shovelful, and a boom began.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after July, 1866, a mining district was organized and Hahn was elected "surveyor", Doyle "recorder", and Way "judge."<sup>6</sup>

With winter approaching, the men decided to split up. Doyle and Hahn agreed to remain at the camp while Way went out for supplies, including saws to build sluice boxes. Way failed to return, and soon Hahn and Doyle were on the verge of starvation. In April, 1867, the two men set out seeking help. On the way to Empire, using snowshoes, Hahn died of exposure, and Doyle was found nearly dead at Troublesome Creek in Middle Park.<sup>7</sup> George Way was never heard from again, and was accused

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<sup>3</sup> John Rolfe Burroughs, *Where the Old West Stayed Young*, (New York: Morrow, 1962), p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, as quoted in Burroughs, p. 91

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93. See also: Charles Leckenby, "Discovery of Gold at Hahn's Peak and the Tragic Death of Joseph Hahn" in *Tread of Pioneers*, (Steamboat Springs, Colorado: Steamboat Pilot, 1944).



of having run off with the money that had been entrusted him to buy goods. The upshot of the Hahn affair was that the Hahn's Peak area was forgotten.

Hahn's Peak was "rediscovered" in 1867 or 1868 by accident. A local resident known as "Bibleback" Brown (so-called because of his humped back), whose actual name was John Brockmeyer, found some rusting mining tools along Willow Creek in the Hahn's Peak area. Logically, he concluded that mining had taken place in the region. Brown confided his information to Bill Slater, a workman on the Union Pacific Railroad in Wyoming, who promptly left for the Elk River Valley.

Slater and Brown built a cabin along Savery Creek and began mining operations. The news of the strike reached Rawlins, and in 1872 the first family in the Elk River Valley moved into the area. Noah Reader and his family were helped by Slater and Brown to construct a cabin, and the settlement of the valley had begun.<sup>8</sup>

In 1872, the same time the upper Elk River was being settled, Hahn's Peak was a booming mining town. The population had increased to over 500 during the summers, but the region was deserted in the winters; however, the citizens of Hahn's Peak felt secure enough to create a mining district in 1874. At this time officials were elected, and the boundaries of the district were defined as being bounded by the Bear (Yampa) River to five miles the other side of Hahn's Peak, and from the Little Snake River to five miles east of Hahn's Peak.<sup>9</sup> In 1876 this region was carved from Grand County, and Hahn's Peak, being the largest town in the area at the time, became county seat of Routt County.

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<sup>8</sup> Burroughs, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.



As was typical of mining areas, the Hahn's Peak District had numerous small camps. Such places as Columbine, Farwell (National City), Whiskey Park, and Slavonia were built in and around Hahn's Peak. These towns were purely summer camps and were generally used as bases for placer mining. Poverty Bar, Bugtown and other small places provided camps that were a bit more rough than "civilized" places like Hahn's Peak townsite. The first mining was placer, using pans and sluice boxes. By the 1880's major hydraulic mining enterprises took over and proceeded to wash away hillsides; this was more profitable but hard on the landscape. It was estimated that some fifty miles of ditches were built to carry water for hydraulic purposes. In addition, most of the smaller mining companies turned to the use of hydraulic equipment, some of which can still be seen at the townsite of Hahn's Peak.<sup>10</sup>

Agriculture was developed as early as 1867 near the mining district. S. B. Reid was growing vegetables in that year, while the Elk River Valley saw the introduction of some cattle by the mid-1870's. The main population center of northwestern Colorado was Hahn's Peak, until about 1875. At that time other settlers arrived and began to develop the Yampa River Valley.<sup>11</sup>

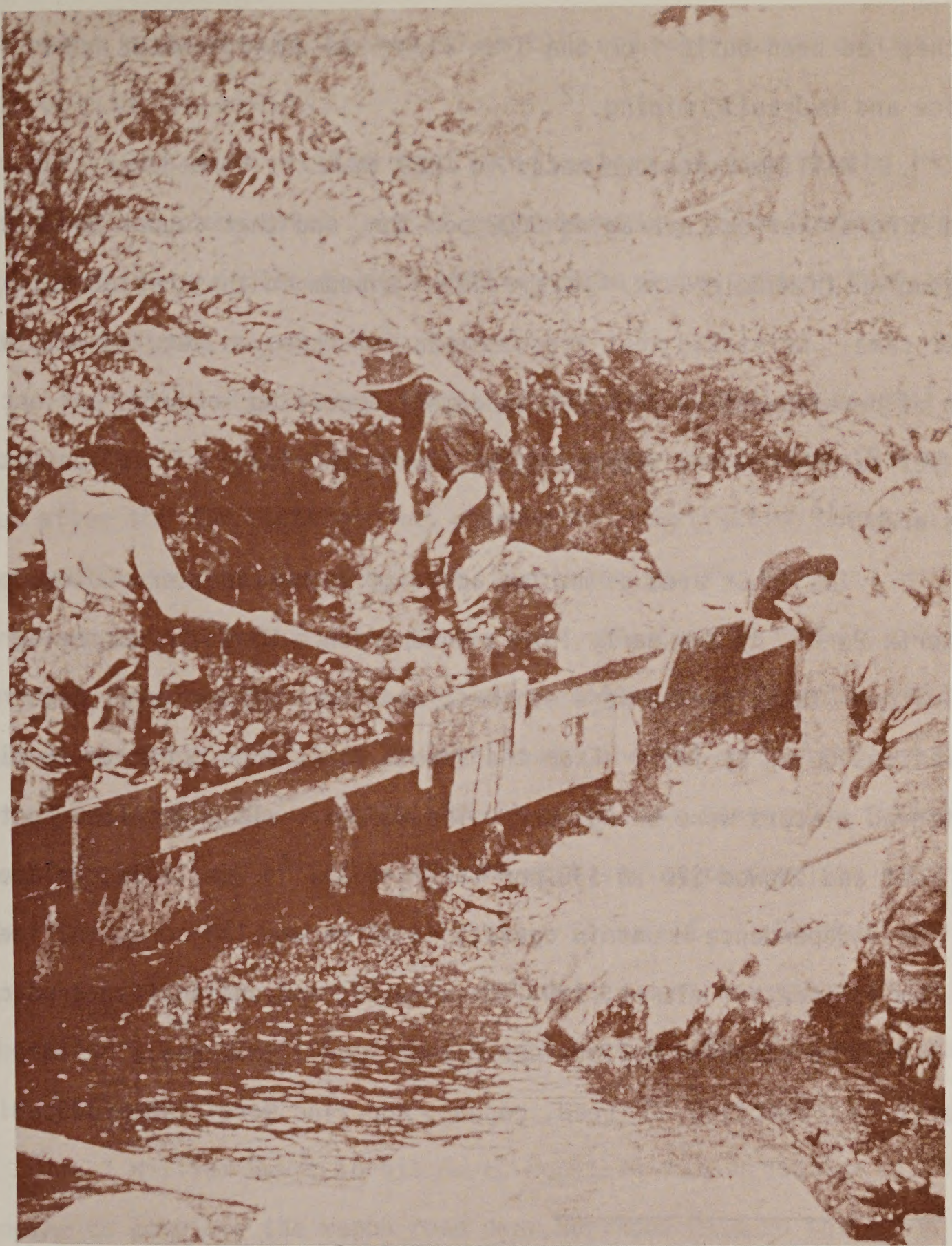
Closer to the mountains, the other major mining district in the northwest sector was the Breckenridge District, which flourished during the 1870's and 1880's. By the mid-'70s, some eighty-four miles of

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<sup>10</sup> Wilbur Stone, *History of Colorado*, (Denver: S. L. Clarke and Co., 1918) 4 Volumes, I, p. 298.

<sup>11</sup> CWA Interviews, Routt County, Colorado, 1933-34, Typescript, S. B. Reid Interview.





Miners as seen working a sluice. This was a common method of early mining. *Colorado State Historical Society.*



ditches had been built from the Blue River, to provide water power for sluice and hydraulic mining.<sup>12</sup>

William Blackmore noted in 1869 that the Blue River country was producing silver ore averaging \$600 per ton, and that copper had been discovered in Middle Park. He predicted a boom in that region but it never came. He stated that northwestern Colorado, as yet, showed little sign of development in that "No lodgement amounting to permanent occupation has yet surmounted the rigors of the Sierra and found a location within this area."<sup>13</sup>

The other area of mining activity in northwestern Colorado was in North Park. By the early 1870's Independence Mountain was being exploited. These claims were placers, and there were several major operations going by 1875. From the Rabbit Ears Range north to Wyoming, scattered placers were being work. The Endomile claim was 1500 feet by 300 feet and showed \$20 to \$35 per ton in gold.<sup>14</sup> The largest placer was the Independence Mountain operation, which was 160 acres in size and had 135 feet of flumes, 100 feet of pits, and one shaft. Production was estimated at three dollars per day per man. Gold was a primary mineral in production.<sup>15</sup> Lead, copper, and zinc were also produced.

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<sup>12</sup> William Blackmore, *Colorado: Its Resources and Prospects*, n.l., n.p., 1869) pp. 134-35

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21, p. 38, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> Robert A. Corregan and David F. Livgane, *Colorado Mining Directory*, (Denver: Colorado Mining Directory Company, 1883), p. 314.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.



These two placers were discovered in 1875 and were worked off and on until the turn of the century.

The major problem that faced western Colorado during the 1860's and 1870's was the total lack of transportation. Even Breckenridge was not served by a railroad until 1882 when the Denver, South Park and Pacific Railroad reached that town.

The United States had long projected a transcontinental rail route. The Civil War intervened and prevented development of a main line. But after the war, interest was renewed and construction began on a national railroad. From the east, the Union Pacific Railroad built westward out of Omaha, while to the west, the Central Pacific started to build over the Sierras to meet the oncoming Union Pacific. A railroad was uppermost in the minds of westerners, and the businessmen of Denver attempted to get the Union Pacific to build into Denver and through the Rockies. The town of Empire went to work trying to convince the railroad that Berthoud Pass was an ideal route. Captain E. L. Berthoud was called in to consult with the railroad. He advised a narrow gauge route over the pass. It was estimated that the cost of construction would come to \$100,000 per mile.<sup>16</sup>

William Byers in his *Rocky Mountain News* urged the citizens of Empire to complete the wagon road over Berthoud Pass so the Union Pacific engineers would see the route in the "best light."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Louise C. Harrison, *Empire and the Berthoud Pass*, (Denver: Big Mountain Press, 1964), p. 203.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.



Needless to say, Byers had an interest in the plan, for the railroad would pass Hot Sulphur Springs. It was projected that by using the Berthoud Pass route, 209 miles could be saved compared to the Wyoming route; also, \$178,920 in costs could be cut. However, nobody thought to mention the cost of maintenance during the winter.<sup>18</sup> In the end, the Union Pacific used a southern Wyoming route and by-passed Colorado.

When the Union Pacific reached Rawlins, Wyoming, transportation south into northwest Colorado became possible. By 1868 the only roads into northwest Colorado led out of Wyoming into places like Hahn's Peak. The railroad helped bring in settlers, and by the mid-1870's there were scattered homesteads along the Yampa River Valley. In 1873, a weekly mail route from the Little Snake River to Rawlins was begun under the auspices of R. M. Dixon. The Dixon Post Office (now Dixon, Wyoming) was the first to serve northwestern Colorado. It served Hahn's Peak, the Yampa Valley, and Elk River Valley.<sup>19</sup>

The railroad also brought visitors to the area. In 1869, an English adventurer, Frederick T. Townshend, came to Laramie by rail and then visited North Park. He described a hunting trip out of Fort Sanders, Wyoming (Laramie). He stated that North Park was "...a plain about thirty miles long by fifteen broad through which flows the Platte River, rising in one of the surrounding mountains."<sup>20</sup> The party, including

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>19</sup> Burroughs, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>20</sup> Frederick T. Townshend, *10,000 Miles of Travel, Sport and Adventure* (London: n.p., 1869), pp. 155-156.



soldiers, were attacked by unspecified Indians (probably Ute) but the natives were driven off without injuries. The Townshend trip indicated that the transcontinental railroad made access to northwestern Colorado easier.<sup>21</sup>

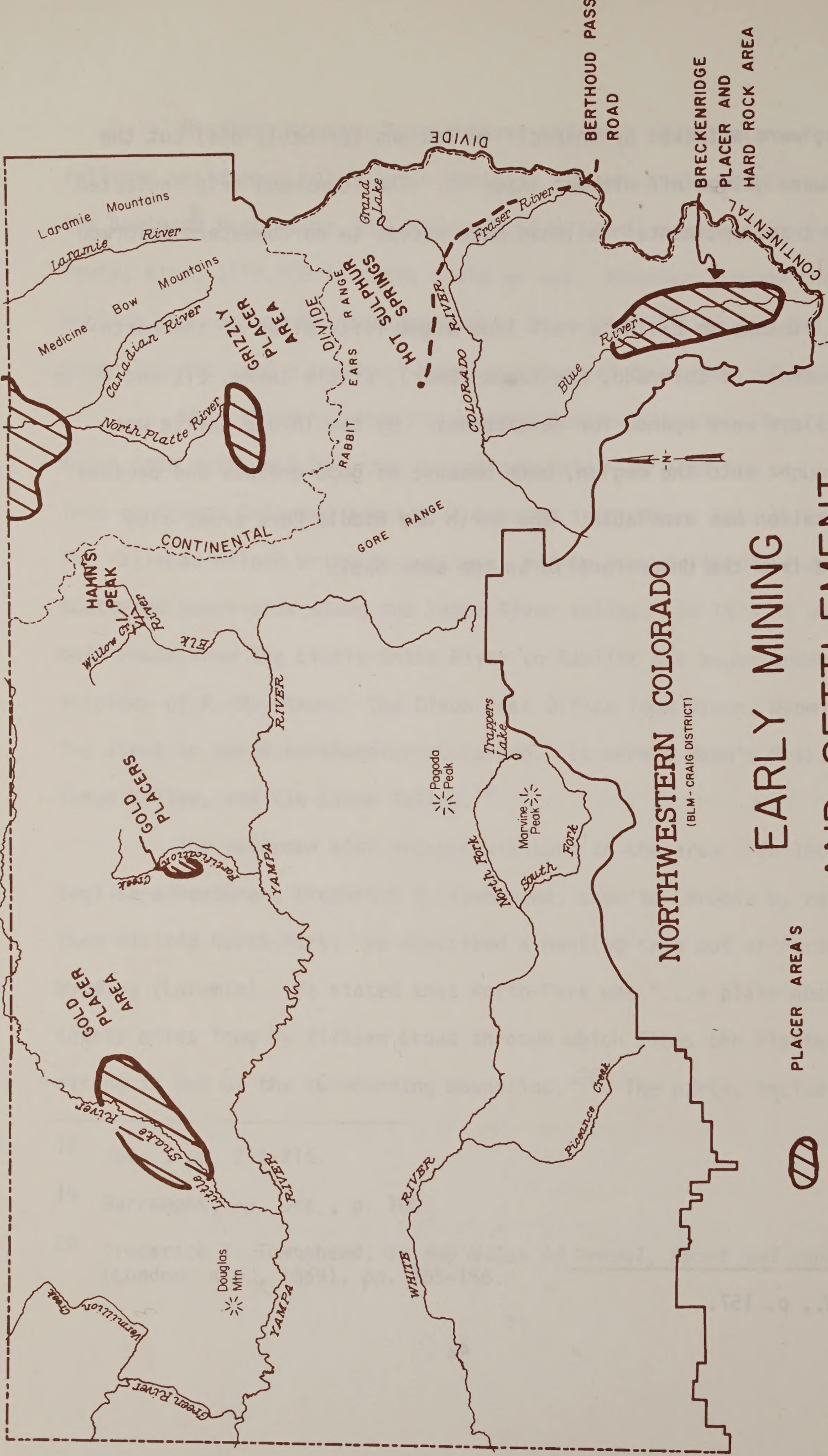
Thanks to having a rail line within fifty miles of the northwestern corner of Colorado, the Yampa (Bear), Little Snake, Elk and White River Valleys were opened for development. By the 1870's cattle were being brought into the region, both because of good grasses and because transportation was available. The North and Middle Park areas also benefited from the Union Pacific on the same basis.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.



W Y O M I N G



# NORTHWESTERN COLORADO

(BLM - CRAIG DISTRICT)

## EARLY MINING AND SETTLEMENT

- PLACER AREA'S
- TOWN SITE
- PASS ROAD

MAP 4



## Chapter V

### CONFRONTATIONS:



### SETTLEMENT VERSUS THE UTE INDIANS







When the Ute nation was moved into the White River Valley, millions of acres of land were lost to white settlement. To most Americans during the nineteenth century, and especially to Coloradans, this loss of land was nearly sinful. To the mind of the 19th-century American, land was for one purpose: it was to be used to produce for profit. Whether by mineral exploitation, timber cutting or agriculture, each acre of land had to give a return, no matter how poor the quality of land involved. Most Americans had no conception of the marginal land that lay west of the Rockies; to them all acreage was fertile and could produce. This simply was not the case for the vast tracts of northwestern Colorado. Only the river valleys where water could be diverted were truly usable. Yet, the 19th century mind saw millions of acres of land going to waste, in the hands of indolent Indians who would rather hunt than farm.

To the average American, the Indian was a creature that was to be pitied. He was clearly a being that needed to be Christianized, as most religious leaders would so inform the public; he needed to be taught to read and write; but most of all he needed to be taught to become a self-sufficient farmer. The prevailing theory was that the Indian had to be made sedentary, taught skills, educated, and only then he could become a productive citizen. The public was told that the American Indian had to be civilized, meaning that he had to become a white man and adopt a value system entirely different from his own.



For the Indian, the task was nearly impossible. For hundreds of years most western American Indians have been nomadic - hunting in the summers, wintering in warm valleys. Now they were told to move into houses, live in one place year round, and farm the land. This concept was totally alien to the Indian. The Indian did not want to accept the demands of the white man. He was willing to make concessions such as wearing white man's clothes, eating his food, and even praying to his God, but to till the soil was asking too much.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, the Utes were forced to accept an Indian agency that was designed for their "conversion". The agents were religious men, ministers, who it was assumed knew what the Indian needed in terms of conversion. It was into this culture conflict that Nathan Meeker maneuvered himself. He was a typical 19th century American who believed in all the principles of Indian welfare and conversion. The Utes, at first, gracefully accepted and tolerated him, but he demanded too much too fast, and the cultural changes that were required by him proved overly demanding for the Ute people.

The first movements of whites across the mountains were small enough that the Utes did not worry about losing their hunting lands. But, by the late 1860's and the early 1870's, scattered settlers were coming into prime Ute lands. In addition, minerals had been discovered in the San Juan Mountains. Silver lodes were believed to be large and profitable. By 1870, many western settlers were demanding access to

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<sup>1</sup> See: Robert Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage*, (Seattle. University of Washington Press, 1965).



these rich lands. However, there was one major problem: the land in question belonged to the Ute Indians. The citizens of Denver, including leading businessmen, demanded that the natives be removed and that the San Juans be opened to settlement. Some of the more radical members of the community demanded extermination.<sup>2</sup>

In 1873, the Ute problem in southern Colorado was ameliorated when a treaty was negotiated by Felix Brunot in which the Utes gave up their claims to the San Juan Mountain region. In return, the Utes agreed to move to three agencies: one in New Mexico called Los Pinos, one along the White River in western Colorado, and one on the Uncompaghere River. The Brunot Treaty provided a temporary answer to a sticky problem and, thanks the generous annuities, the promise of land, and an influential progressive chief, Ouray, the Utes were peacefully relocated.<sup>3</sup>

Luckily, the people of Colorado were able to deal with an intelligent and perceptive Ute chief who saw that resistance would do

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See Robert Emmitt, *The Last War Trail*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955) and Marshall Sprague, *Tragedy at White River*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957) for general descriptions by modern journalists of the events leading up to the Ute removal. Other sources include: Elizabeth Nixon, "Meeker Massacre.." (Greeley, Colorado: Colorado State Teacher's College, 1935), Master Thesis T. L. Iden, "History of the Ute Indian Cessions of Colorado" (Gunnison, Colorado: Western State College, 1928), Master's Thesis: Agnes E. Spiva, "Utes in Colorado" (Boulder, Colorado, University of Colorado, 1929), Master's Thesis; J. P. Boyd, *Recent Indian Wars*, (n. l., n.p. 1891); Thomas F. Dawson, *The Ute War*, (Boulder: Jphnson Publishing Co., 1964); and Al Look, *Last Stand at White River and Milk Creek, Western Colorado in 1879*, (Denver: Golden Bell Press, 1972). The *Colorado Magazine* contains a number of excellent articles regarding the Utes. See page 276 of the *Colorado Magazine* Index, 1921-1948.

<sup>3</sup> Emmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 26.



no good. Ouray, who spoke English and Spanish, and who was wise enough to realize that no one could stop the progress of the whites, used his power to persuade the Utes to accept their fate. In doing so, he prevented years of bloodshed that might otherwise have occurred.

While the Treaty of 1873 allowed white settlement in the San Juans, many settlers who moved into Middle Park and North Park resented the use of the areas by the Utes for hunting. It was claimed that the Indians started forest fires, ran off livestock and wantonly killed animals.<sup>4</sup>

The Ute move into the White River Agency was peaceful and organized. Here the Utes could hunt, fish, and live as they always had. In addition, they were granted an annuity of some \$10,000 which provided food, clothing, and other goods. The problem came when the agents tried to force the Utes to "learn white ways".<sup>5</sup> By the Brunot Treaty, the Utes had been granted all lands from the Continental Divide west into Utah and from the White River north to Wyoming. This meant that the Utes were given choice hunting grounds, in addition to excellent agricultural lands. However, the Ute saw no reason why they should not continue to use all the hunting lands in the old traditional manner. The United States government saw the question in a different light. Indian policy, under Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior, called for the "civilization" of the natives of America. This meant that the Indians should be taught English, that they should learn to read and write, that they should become agriculturally

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<sup>4</sup> Sprague, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Emmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 53. See also: Nathan C. Meeker, *Letter to the Secretary of the Interior*, 1879 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1880).



oriented, and that they should wear white men's clothing and live in houses. In short, they were to be transformed from nomads to a sedentary people, to become carbon-copy white men. That this policy was in force was in evidence no more strongly than at White River.

The White River Agency had a history of problems. Since its establishment in 1868, the agency had seen several agents come and go. Most left in total frustration. The next to last agent, the Reverend H. E. Danforth, quit because the government failed to deliver the promised annuities on schedule. The Indians deeply resented the fact that goods such as flour, blankets, and other supplies sat in the depot at Rawlins, Wyoming, and rotted.<sup>6</sup>

To succeed Danforth, Nathan Cook Meeker was chosen. In many ways, he was the worst possible choice, while in other respects he was perfect - a visionary altruist. Meeker was one of the founders of Greeley, Colorado (the Union Colony), and he was a minister, in addition to being a skilled agriculturalist. Meeker was sixty-seven years old and in deep financial trouble when he gained the appointment to the White River Agency. He was given the job, thanks to political pull on the part of the Secretary of the Interior, Carl Schurz. Meeker saw this position as an opportunity for testing out his theories on Indian re-civilization, while the job also would help pay off his debts in Greeley.

In 1878, Meeker moved to the White River Agency, which was then located just east of present-day Meeker. He quickly surveyed the

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<sup>6</sup> Letter quoted in Emmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54



region and decided to move the agency downriver to Powell Park, which he felt was perfect for agriculture. He planned to irrigate the valley from the White River, to build the Utes houses, to provide a school, to put up a commissary that would dole out the annuities, and to fence the land in the fashion of the white man. These concepts were totally new to the Ute, who while interested, failed to understand.<sup>7</sup>

Upon arriving at White River, Meeker met several Ute chiefs, including Douglas (so-called because he looked like Steven A. Douglas), Jack or Captain Jack, who had been raised by a Mormon family, the medicine man Johnson, and the fat Colorow. Douglas seems to have been the main spokesman for the Utes, and when Meeker explained his great plans, Douglas said that the Utes were not interested. When Meeker finally said that these plans were orders from Washington, D. C. the Utes, awed by "Washington" agreed to try the new system.<sup>8</sup>

With Douglas' and the other Utes' reluctant approval, Meeker began his great experiment. The agent began by moving the agency to Powell Park, where he erected several buildings, including a house for himself, a school, and a store. His daughter, Josephine, was on the government payroll as schoolmistress and doctor. His wife, Arvella, became the self-appointed religious teacher of the Indians.<sup>9</sup> Meeker found that his main problem was keeping the Utes on the reservation. They were constantly moving out to go hunting. To hunt they naturally

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<sup>7</sup> Emmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 55 and Sprague, *op. cit.*, p. 143

<sup>8</sup> Sprague, *op. cit.*, p. 176

<sup>9</sup> Emmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-68



needed guns and ammunition, for which they traded goods with merchants at Hayden and Lay, Colorado. Meeker found that this "impeded progress" and decided to keep the Indians on the reservation by using their rations as bait.

Meeker imported agency employees from Greeley, where he knew he could find "sober, upright men" to work with the Indians. He employed a Mr. Curtis from the Los Pinos Agency to supervise the work of ditch digging, which began under his and Captain Jack's auspices. Over 5,000 feet of irrigation ditches were dug; the Indians were paid; and everyone settled in peaceably for the winter of 1878.<sup>10</sup> Through the summer of 1879, Meeker worked with the Utes trying to get them interested in growing crops that could pay for the agency. Meeker found that the Indians became more and more disinterested; soon most of them left for the mountains to hunt. Meeker's letters progressed from optimistic in March, 1878, when he first arrived, to more and more gloomy. By September, 1879, his communications showed fear, not just gloom.<sup>11</sup>

During the summer of 1879, the Meeker plan seemed to go fairly well. However, there were several incidents that increased tensions. First, a series of forest fires swept the Parks and much of the Yampa Valley; it was an extremely dry summer and such fires were natural. However, many white settlers in the Parks, especially Egeria Park, blamed the Utes, claiming that they were trying to get rid of settlers by burning

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<sup>9</sup> Emmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-68

<sup>10</sup> Meeker, *op. cit.*, p. 71

<sup>11</sup> Meeker, *op. cit.*, p. 2.



them out. Such an uproar was caused by the fires that numerous complaints poured into Denver, and the governor's office asked for troops. Indeed, some forty cavalry were sent to Middle Park from the 9th Cavalry Regiment. These were the "Buffalo Soldiers," an all-black regiment, much feared and hated by the Utes.<sup>12</sup> The other incident that summer was the reported burning of a home near Hayden in August, 1879. A "posse" from Hot Sulphur Springs was sent out to find the two Indians held responsible for the "outrage", "Bennett" and "Chinaman". They were found. Meeker, having been apprised of the situation, refused to go to Hayden to look at the home. Douglas said it had not been touched, which was true. Meeker said that if a white man had said that it had been burned, then Douglas was lying.<sup>13</sup>

As the summer progressed, Meeker was eager to get as much land as possible under cultivation. He decided that the racetrack the Indians had at the agency had to go, because the land should be put to use; racing was wasting the time of the natives; there were too many horses for the park, and there was continual gambling during the races. When Meeker suggested that the Indians should kill some of the animals to lessen the grazing burden on Powell Park, the Utes were outraged.<sup>14</sup>

On September 10, 1879, the tensions that had been growing came to a head. Chief Johnson went to Meeker's home to discuss the destruction

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<sup>12</sup> As detailed in Emmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-90

<sup>13</sup> Sprague, *op. cit.*, p. 120

<sup>14</sup> Emmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-151



of the horsetrack. Meeker refused to listen to Johnson's protestations and the chief, in anger, shoved Meeker against a hitching post. The old man fell and bruised himself. With this "assault" Meeker wired Rawlins, Wyoming, with the message that he had been seriously injured by Johnson, and that a plowman had been shot at on September 8th.<sup>15</sup> He then requested help from Governor Frederick Pitkin or General John Pope. Neither the War Department nor the Bureau of Indian Affairs felt it necessary to send in troops at that point.

Finally, after much communication between Nathan Meeker, Fort Steel, Wyoming, General John Pope, and the War Department, it was decided to send troops to White River to arrest the troublemakers, and to restore order at the agency. In late September, Major Thomas T. Thornburgh was ordered to march to White River with a detachment of 190 men. He had with him two companies of cavalry under the commands of Captain J. S. Payne and Lieutenant B. D. Price, and a long supply train.<sup>16</sup> They camped along Fortification Creek at the mouth of Blue Gravel Creek, and then marched to the Yampa River where depot was established south of Lay, Colorado. Thornburgh, totally unaware of conditions at White River, was forced to rely on his scouts, including Joe Rankin, an avid Indian-hater.

On the second day out, the Thornburgh detachment camped along the Bear (Yampa) River, and then moved into Coal Creek Canyon not far from White River. Here they were met by Douglas and Colorow, along with

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<sup>15</sup> As quoted in Emmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

<sup>16</sup> Wesley Merritt, "Three Indian Campaigns", *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, April, 1890, pp. 720-737, and Emmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 166.



Captain Jack. Major Thornburgh and the Indians talked about what the soldiers were doing in the area, and Thornburgh explained he had been ordered there by Washington. Rankin did his best to discredit the Ute's claims that they came in peace and would leave the soldiers alone if the troops did not come to White River. Thornburgh, much to his credit, ignored Rankin. Thornburgh promised that he would reconsider moving to White River and that he would tell Douglas what he decided before he moved.

Meeker, in the meantime, sent a message to Thornburgh. He asked that five men be sent to the agency to look over the situation, and that Thornburgh camp nearby.<sup>17</sup> Thornburgh replied that he would camp along the Milk River, and then send five men with E. H. Eskridge (an agency employee) to White River.<sup>18</sup> Meeker wrote to Thornburgh on September 29th that he expected the five men the next day, and that Douglas would fly the American Flag as a sign of peace; this letter never reached Thornburgh.

In order to reach White River on September 30, Thornburgh had to traverse a small canyon into the valley. Here, as Rankin pointed out, would be a perfect place for an ambush. This was where the Utes under Douglas were placed along the canyon rims, waiting to see what would happen. At this point, Douglas and Colorow lost control of the young warriors. Douglas and Thornburgh both expected to talk, but someone

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<sup>17</sup> Meeker to Thornburgh, September 27, 1879, as quoted in Emmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>18</sup> As described in *Merritt and the Indian Wars* (London: Johnson-Trauton Military Press, 1972).



fired, and before Douglas could stop the firing, the Utes and the Army were engaged in a battle.

Thornburgh was killed almost immediately. The soldiers fled back toward the hills to the northwest. The wagons were circled, and fallen horses became breastwork. The firing continued all day, and when the day was over, fifty men had been killed or wounded, including nearly all the officers.<sup>19</sup>

Joe Rankin made a twenty-eight hour dash to Rawlins to report the battle. On October 1, 1879, the garrison at Fort Russell heard that the Utes had nearly wiped out the detachment at Milk River. The War Department ordered Colonel Wesley Merritt to move from Fort D. A. Russell (near Cheyenne) via the Union Pacific to Fort Steele. Merritt was ordered to take two hundred cavalry and 150 infantry to relieve Captain Payne at Milk River.<sup>20</sup> The confusion was compounded by the Denver newspapers which reported an uprising on the Southern Ute Reservation.

Captain F. S. Dodge, who was stationed in Middle Park with his Ninth Cavalry, the much-feared black troops, was ordered on October 1st to relieve Thornburgh. He arrived on October 2nd and reinforced the besieged troops. Meanwhile, Merritt, moving south, arrived on October 5th, only to discover that the fight was over.<sup>21</sup> The Utes withdrew in the face of his command.

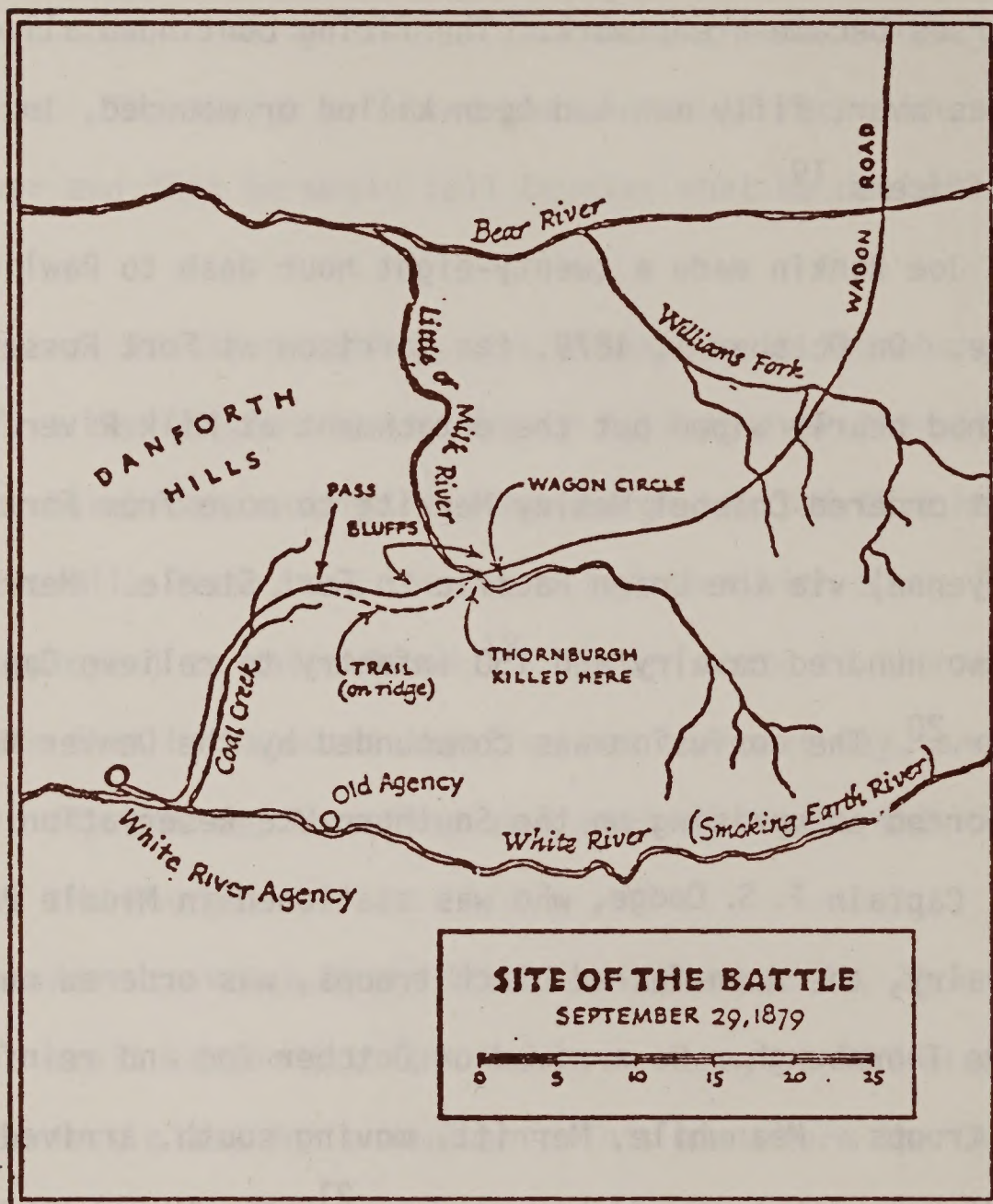
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<sup>19</sup> Merritt, *op. cit.*, p. 732. Also described in: Maria B. Kimball, *A Soldier-Doctor of Our Army*, (n.l., n.p., 1917)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 733.

<sup>21</sup> Emmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 221





Site of the Thornburgh Battle, September 29, 1879  
From Robert Emmitt, *The Last War Trail*, page 201.



While the Thornburgh detachment was under attack, the White River Agency was also attacked by the Utes. On the night of September 30, 1879, the Indians at the agency rose up and killed all eleven white males at White River. Meeker was killed and his body pierced by a barrel stave. The Utes then took hostage Mrs. Meeker, her daughter, Josephine, Mrs. Shadrack Price, and her two children.<sup>22</sup>

It was not until October 13, 1879, that the newspapers got their first dispatches describing the agency massacre as portrayed by Merritt, second on the scene. The headline blazed, "A SCENE OF SLAUGHTER", and the citizens of Denver demanded immediate action. Governor Pitkin denounced the massacre in no uncertain terms, and also pointed out that 12,000,000 acres of land could be opened with the removal of the Utes.<sup>23</sup> Herein lay the perfect opportunity to remove the Indians for good.

The Ute uprising came to an end when Chief Ouray was able to send a message to the Northern Utes to lay down their arms. Douglas, Colorow, Johnson, and others fled into the hills where they awaited the outcome of negotiations with Ouray. Former Indian Agent, General Charles Adams, working with Ouray, managed to secure the release of the captives. None of the hostages were harmed, and Josephine actually praised the humane treatment they had received.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> As quoted from Emmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-234.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Pitkin, quoted in *Denver Daily News*, October 13, 1879.

<sup>24</sup> See: Josephine Meeker, *The Ute Massacre!* (Philadelphia: Old Franklin Publishing Co., 1879).



The Utes had been initially provoked, but despite their fair treatment of the captives, and regardless of Douglas' attempts at peace, the citizens of Colorado were demanding "the Utes Must Go". The outcome of the Meeker Massacre was that a commission was established to find out what had happened, and to punish those who were guilty of the uprising. The commission had only the white women as eye-witnesses, and Ouray refused to let them testify (under Ute law their testimony was null and void). Ouray demanded a trial in Washington, D. C., where he felt the Indians would get a fair hearing. Since the commission did not have such authority, Douglas and several minor chiefs were put on a train for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, on the pretext that they were going to Washington. They were held in jail at Leavenworth for several years; this was the extent of the punishment for the Utes who took part in the uprising.<sup>25</sup>

More importantly, the rebellion provided the reason for the final removal of the Utes. In 1880, a delegation of Utes left for Washington, headed by Ouray. A treaty was put together by which the Utes lost their western Colorado lands. The Indians were given two reservations. The Southern Utes were put on the La Plata Reservation, while the Northern Utes were moved to Utah to the Uintah Reservation. In addition, they were given \$60,000 in back annuities, and \$50,000 in new annuities. Three-fourths of the males of the Ute Tribe had to sign the treaty before it became effective.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Emmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-287.

<sup>26</sup> Sprague, *op. cit.*, p. 315. See also: Committee on *Indian Affairs* U. S. Congress. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880) 46th Congress, Session 2, House Document, Misc., #38. Also see: U. S. White River Ute Commission, (U.S. Congress, 56th, 2nd Session, Executive Document, 83, 1880).



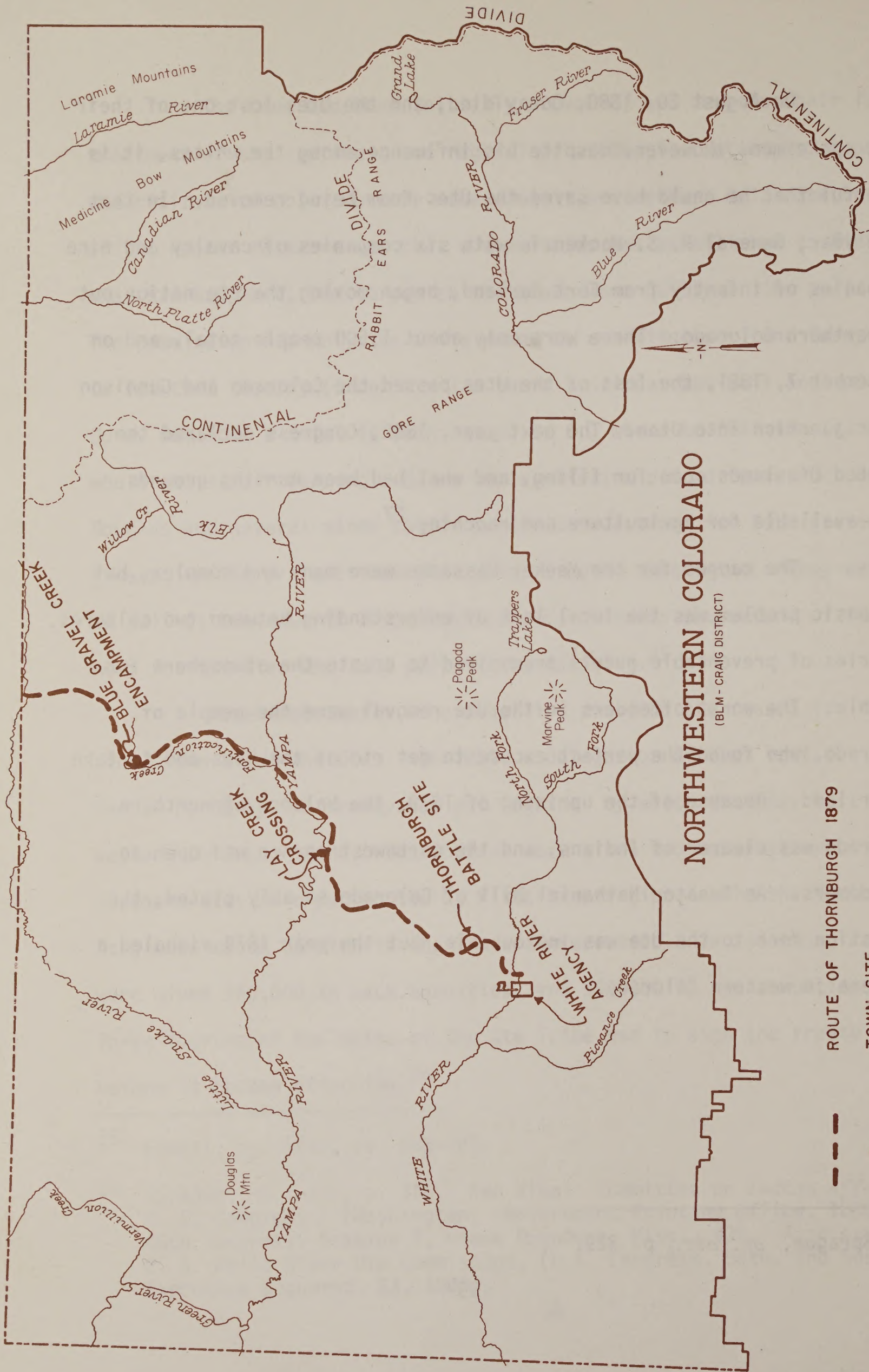
On August 20, 1880, Ouray died, and the Utes lost one of their best spokesmen. However, despite his influence among the whites, it is doubtful that he could have saved the Utes from being removed. In that same year, General R. S. Mackenzie with six companies of cavalry and nine companies of infantry from Fort Garland, began moving the Ute nation out of northern Colorado. There were only about 1,500 people total, and on September 7, 1881, the last of the Utes passed the Colorado and Gunnison River junction into Utah. The next year, 1882, Congress declared the vacated Ute lands open for filing, and what had been hunting grounds were available for agriculture and ranching.<sup>27</sup>

The causes for the Meeker Massacre were many and complex, but the basic problem was the total lack of understanding between two cultures. A series of preventable events transpired to create the atmosphere for trouble. The worst offenders in the Ute removal were the people of Colorado, who found the perfect excuse to get rid of the Utes and to take their land. Because of the uprising of 1879, the balance of northern Colorado was cleared of Indians, and the northwest corner was open to all comers. As Senator Nathaniel Hill of Colorado so ably stated, the injustice done to the Ute was inexcusable, but the year 1879 signaled a new era in western Colorado.

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<sup>27</sup> Sprague, *op. cit.*, p. 329.





ROUTE OF THORNBURGH 1879

TOWN SITE

NORTHWESTERN COLORADO  
(BLM - CRAIG DISTRICT)

# THE THORNBURGH MASSACRE



## Chapter VI

# SETTLEMENT IN MIDDLE PARK AND THE YAMPA VALLEY









Prior to the Ute removal, western Colorado was of intense interest to potential settlers and speculators. Middle Park, one of the earliest areas settled west of the divide, saw new development in the 1870's, while far western Colorado was prepared for further settlement by a series of surveys that took place starting in 1871 and lasted until 1876. These surveys were the last major western mapping operations, and they were conducted by the newly created United States Geological Survey, under the direction of Ferdinand V. Hayden.

Hayden began his team surveys with the Middle Park area in 1871. The work included a detailed description of the geology of the park, and appendix that provided details on the flora and fauna, and a physical topographic survey (made by A. R. Marvine). He drew no conclusions as to the worth of the Park.<sup>1</sup> A year later the Grand River valley was explored by A. C. Peale who provided a detailed geologic report on the area. At the same time Gustavus R. Beckler surveyed the geology of South and Middle Parks. The topography of the Grand Valley was done by Henry Gannett in 1875.

In 1876 the results of the far northwestern Colorado surveys were published. The geology of the area was provided by C. A. White, while A. D. Wilson did the topography. F. M. Endlich wrote the geology for the White River section, while George Chittenden provided the topography for

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<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand V. Hayden, *United States Geologic Survey of the Territories, Annual Report*, 1st-12th, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1867-1878, 12 Volumes, 1873. p. 81.



the White River. Gustavus Beckler wrote the topographic descriptions of the Yampa Valley. This survey included North Park (Beckler) and over to the Utah-Colorado line.<sup>2</sup>

The 1876 survey showed that North Park had some 700 square miles of grazing lands that had agricultural potential.<sup>3</sup> The Hayden party noted that Douglas and Piceance Creeks were constant, but other subsidiary creeks could not be relied upon, which made agriculture in the Piceance Basin risky.<sup>4</sup> They concluded that the Yampa and Egeria Park areas were good grazing lands, while the Little Snake River region was well watered grassland.<sup>5</sup> The party noted that agriculture was possible in that "Mr. Danforth has cultivated about forty acres of land for the use of the agency...". This referred to Reverend Danforth's efforts at the White River Agency where he was growing potatoes, turnips, beets, and carrots in 1875.<sup>6</sup>

The Hayden survey of this area consisted of a sample of 800 square miles, which took ten days to survey. This would seem like a very small sample of land. However, the group managed to look at most of the major geologic features of the region, and they triangulated most of the corner with remarkable accuracy. The conclusions drawn from the survey were that agriculture would be difficult without irrigation, and that the

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume for 1875.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume for 1876, p. 344.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume for 1876, p. 346.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume for 1876, p. 347.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Volume for 1876, p. 353.



land was good only near the river valleys where grazing could take place. The Hayden survey provided the first solid information on this area since the Fremont and Powell expeditions. Through the publication of such information, prospective settlers were apprised of the worth of the land. Hayden really did little to help settlement; in 1876 he wrote that the region was: "...nearly all uninhabitable both winter and summer...".<sup>7</sup> Hayden notwithstanding, settlers moved into this worthless region.

During the Hayden surveys a major scandal took place in far western Colorado. In 1872 the reported discovery of "diamonds" in the region precipitated a major mining investment boom; this swindle was of such quality and magnitude that many prominent men became involved in it. The plot revolved around Phillip Arnold and John Slack, who came to San Francisco with a sackful of raw diamonds. The stones were carefully shown to the "right people", and it was intimated that a huge field existed somewhere in the West.<sup>8</sup>

Slack and Arnold disappeared and then reappeared; soon they were bought out for \$600,000, and the New York and San Francisco Mining and Commercial Company was founded by such luminaries as Grenville Dodge, General George McClellan, and Ben Butler. But there were skeptics. To quiet fears, the company hired Henry Janin, whose reputation was unquestioned when it came to evaluating mining potential; Janin looked at the goods and pronounced them real.<sup>9</sup> This was the beginning of a rush to Colorado.

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<sup>7</sup> Ferdinand V. Hayden, "Explorations Made in Colorado", *American Naturalist*, Vol. XI, Number 2, 1877, pp. 73-86.

<sup>8</sup> Richard A. Bartlett, *Great Surveys of the American West.*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 187.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.



It was hinted that the diamonds were in the San Luis Valley, but the Laramie *Sentinel* scooped Colorado papers, when it determined that the field was in Wyoming or northern Colorado.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Clarence King, head of the United States Geological Survey, had been drawn into the "find", and he had approved of it.

In the fall of 1872 a serious search for the gem field began. Samuel F. Emmons of the USGS started to work with what little information he had, and soon concluded that what is now called the Diamond Peak area was the probable site. Emmons and his party worked in the Green and Yampa valleys seeking the field; they found little but coal.<sup>11</sup> However, Emmons and his men did finally indeed find gems, mostly rubies, on the north side of the peak. Within hours, mining claims were scattered over the mountain. However, upon further investigation, the Emmons group found that the stones had been planted near ant-hills, which showed signs of having been disturbed. Soon they gathered enough evidence to indicate that a fraud had been perpetrated. It was not until November, 1872, that King released the news that the diamond fields were a hoax. The company that had been created collapsed, and \$350,000 in invested monies disappeared. King and the USGS got some glory from this fraud - many miners and mining communities noted that thanks to the Geological Survey, events such as this could be prevented. In exposing the fraud, King helped set the stage for new USGS work in the west; people felt that the government was doing something to protect public interest.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203



The Middle Park and Egeria Park areas were developing rapidly into cattle and ranch lands by the mid-1870's. As has been noted William Byers tried to develop Hot Sulphur Springs as a resort in the early 1860's; however, due to the lack of good roads into the Park, not much developed. Middle Park was finally opened in 1873, when John Q. A. Rollins constructed a wagon road over Rollins Pass. This toll road led from South Boulder Creek over the Continental Divide and down into the Winter Park area. It was a well-built road, usable most of the year. Rollins charged \$2.50 per wagon, and with this development, Middle Park saw a new flow of settlers. That same year saw the creation of Grand County, with Byers, Rollins, and Porter M. Smart in the lead. With the establishment of a county, the Middle Park country became civilized to a point that some towns actually sprang up. Byers drew up plans for the town of Hot Sulphur Springs in 1873, while other little ranches were destined to become towns.<sup>12</sup>

Middle Park, now Grand County, saw a number of filings take place. Hilery Harris filed for a ranch in 1874, while Tracy Tyler claimed land at the site of Kremmling. John Himebaugh took out a claim, as did a family named McQueary. The Humphrey and Green families were soon to arrive. In 1875 Henry King took out land along Troublesome Creek. In July, 1875,

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<sup>12</sup> Robert C. Black, *Island in the Rockies*, (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Press, 1969), p. 85. See also: Louise C. Harrison, *Empire and the Berthoud Pass*, (Denver: Big Mountain Press, 1964); Mary L. Cairns, *Grand Lake: The Pioneers*, (Denver: World Press, 1946); Mary L. Cairns, *The Olden Days: A Companion Book to Grand Lake: The Pioneers*, (Denver: World Press, 1954) and Cora Belle Oberholtzer "The Grazing Industry of Middle Park, Colorado", (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1942), MS.



Barney Day appeared and claimed a ranch along the same creek. He was the father of the first white child born in the Park in July, 1876.<sup>13</sup>

However, despite the number of families coming into the Park, the main trade was still summer tourism. It was estimated that in August, 1874, between 200 and 300 visitors were in the area. They scattered out from Grand Lake to Hot Sulphur Springs. In fact, trade was so good that Byers built a second hotel at the Springs that same year. While Byers was expanding his holdings, Rollins bought land near the Fraser River to provide hay. Here he built the Junction House at the site of the present town of Tabernash.<sup>14</sup> Porter Smart also tried to cash in on the boom by organizing the Bear River Colonization and Improvement Company to import settlers, an operation that came to naught.

In the same year the Berthoud Pass road was rebuilt and opened to traffic. The major figure behind this was Lewis Gaskill, who finally settled in Middle Park. The Berthoud Road was soon recognized as superior to Rollins Pass, and by 1880 the Rollins Road was in ruins. Berthoud Pass provided better transportation into the Park. In 1875 mail service was begun over the Pass, and by 1876 a regular stage run was inaugurated by the Colorado State Company, Bela Hughes and Ben Holladay, owners.<sup>15</sup>

Lewis Gaskill was destined to become one of the major figures in the Park, for he discovered gold in the region. In 1879 a minor boom occurred when gold was found near Teller City. From it arose a series of

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<sup>13</sup> Black, *op. cit.*, p. 101, and Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 270.



towns including Teller City, Lulu City, and Burnett. These little camps showed great promise in the early '80's, but by 1885 the rush was over, and the towns died from lack of mineral resources. The census of 1885 shows the population of Grand County at only fifteen.<sup>16</sup>

Mining was not solely to blame for the depletion of the population. The threat of the Ute Indians remained until after 1879. In fact, over 100,000 acres of timber were burned in 1878, and a number of settlers fled. Yet a few remained; William Cozens established the first post office in Fraser in 1876 and stayed through the various problems, while the King family was still there in 1885. Still, Middle Park, an area that had shown so much promise, was virtually dead by 1885.<sup>17</sup>

With the Middle Park area very slowly filling up, other settlers continued to press westward. In 1876 the James H. Crawford family settled in the Steamboat Springs area. This became the site of modern-day Steamboat Springs. Other than a few miners at Hahn's Peak, the upper end of the Yampa Valley remained unsettled. Egeria Park was settled to a limited extent by 1882, but these people were primarily in the ranching business, and many of them moved north to Steamboat. Egeria Park's first permanent settler was Bernard Spunk, who came to the area in 1882. The next year a post office was opened at his ranch.<sup>18</sup>

Farther west a few ranches were appearing. With the ranches came small settlements which usually contained a post office and a supply store.

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<sup>16</sup> Cairns, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-105 and Black 90. *op. cit.*, pp. 152-159.

<sup>17</sup> Cairns, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-105 and Black, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-159

<sup>18</sup> Charles Leckenby, *The Tread of Pioneers*, (Steamboat Springs, Colorado; Steamboat Pilot, 1944), pp. 120-121.



These trading posts catered to local ranchers (of whom there were very few), and until late 1879, to the Utes of the region. That there was settlement is seen in George Crofutt's listing of towns (usually post offices) as of 1881. In northwestern Colorado the following "towns" were found:

<u>Town</u>	<u>County</u>
Axial	Routt
Egeria (Park)	Routt
Edith	Routt
Fraser	Grand
Hahn's Peak	Routt
Hayden	Routt
Hot Sulphur Springs	Grand
Lay	Routt
Lulu (City)	Grand
Maybell	Routt
Meeker	Routt
Middle (Park)	Routt
North Park	Grand
Rangely	Routt
Routt	Routt
Slater	Routt
Steamboat Springs	Routt
Teller (City)	Grand
Troublesome	Grand
Walden	Grand
Yampa	Routt

The western slope of Colorado was indeed being settled, but the so-called towns were widely scattered. Weekly mail service to Rawlins, Wyoming was common, as was semi-regular stage service. Crofutt notes that all lines led from Rawlins. For example, he notes that Axial was 135 miles from Rawlins and the stage fare was twenty-two dollars, one way.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> George Crofutt, *Grip-Sack Guide to Colorado*, (Omaha: Overland Publishing Co., 1881), pp. 73, 81, 84, 87, 88, 92, 94, 110, 111, 116, 123, 124, 145, and 147.)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.



He stated that Hayden was 122 miles from Rawlins, while Rangely was so isolated that it had no mail service. Most of the towns were stock raising supply centers, and Crofutt found that they had little potential for growth.<sup>21</sup>

North Park also saw settlement by the mid-1870's. J. O. Pinkham (after whom Pinkhampton was named) brought cattle into the Park in 1874 or 1875. He used the natural abundance of wild hay to feed his stock, while at the same time he sold some of it to settlers in Middle Park.<sup>22</sup> Across the Park Range, the Steamboat Springs area's main crop was also wild hay, which was shipped to Wyoming for transport back East on the Union Pacific.<sup>23</sup>

By the mid-1880's, Middle, North, and Egeria Parks had been settled. Cattle and hay were the main industries, although some coal was being mined in the Steamboat Springs area for local consumption.

Steamboat Springs became the unofficial "capitol" of the region by the late 1880's. The townsite itself was laid out in 1884 by James Crawford. The Steamboat Springs Townsite Company was capitalized at \$160,000, and soon after the formal organization, merchants began to appear. The Steamboat *Pilot* was founded in 1885, while the first general store was incorporated in 1886 as Milner and Company. A few years earlier a mail route from Steamboat to Hayden had been established, when a small

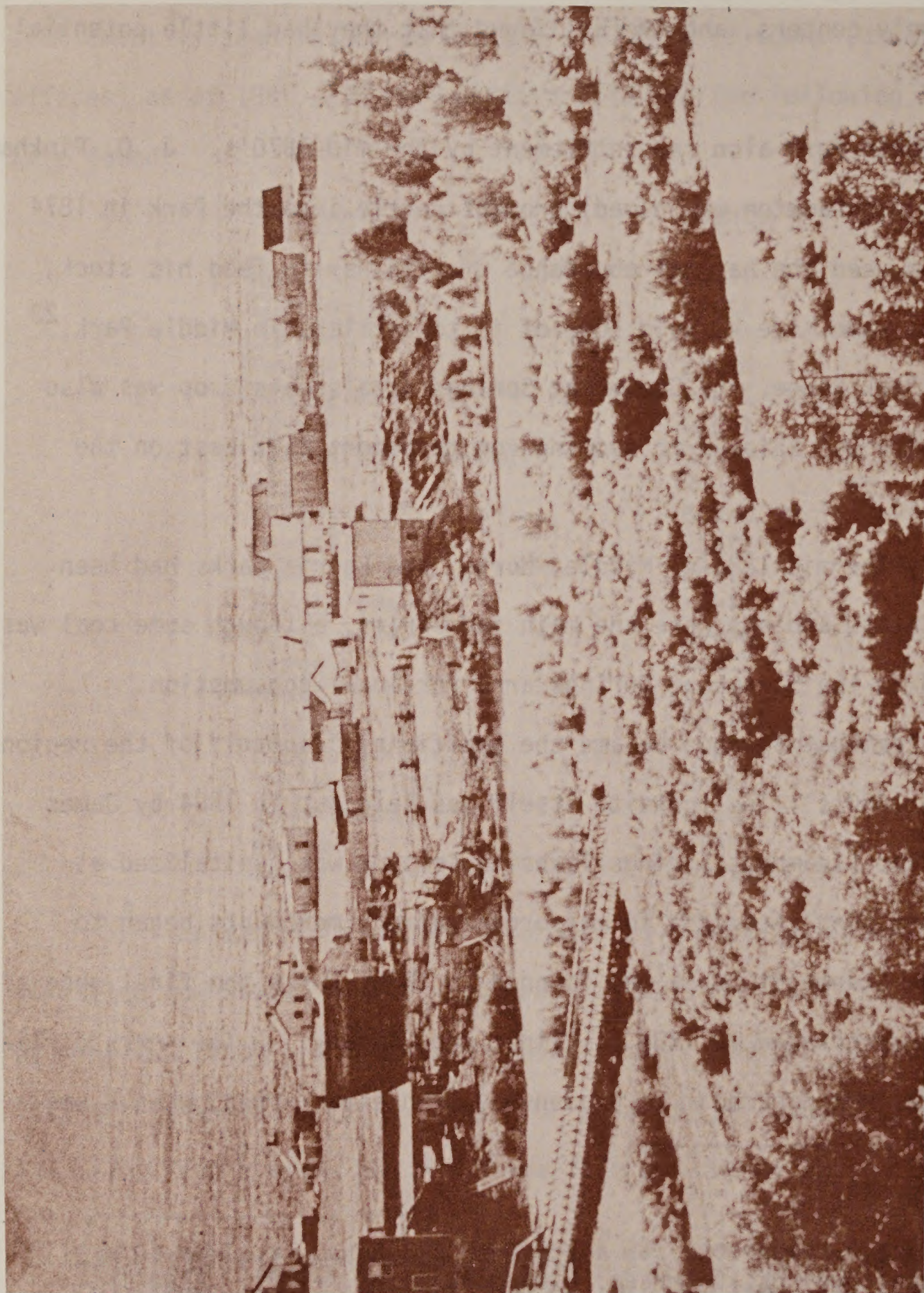
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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133

<sup>22</sup> See: Alice R. Donelson, *The North Park Stockgrowers, 1899-1970*, (Steamboat Springs, Colorado: Steamboat *Pilot*, 1973). Also in Steven Payne, *Where the Rockies Ride Herd*. (Denver: Sage Books, 1965).

<sup>23</sup> Donelson, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-5





Middle Park grew slowly. This view of Hot Sulphur Springs about 1900 shows a moderately prospering city. *Colorado State Historical Society.*



mining rush occurred on Fortification Creek. Along the creek placer gold was found in 1882; but the boom died out, and little else developed in that area. Steamboat, having a newspaper, a series of stores, and by 1889 a stage line to Russell (Wolcott), became the largest town in the area. It was estimated that 500 people resided in the Steamboat Springs region.<sup>24</sup>

Further development of this area had to wait until better transportation was available. New mineral deposits also helped to re stimulate the Yampa Valley. To the west the cattle industry was dominant, and most cattlemen were very careful to keep the range to themselves. Such names as Iles, Hoy, Rash, and Haley were dominant in northwestern Colorado society, politics, and economic development.

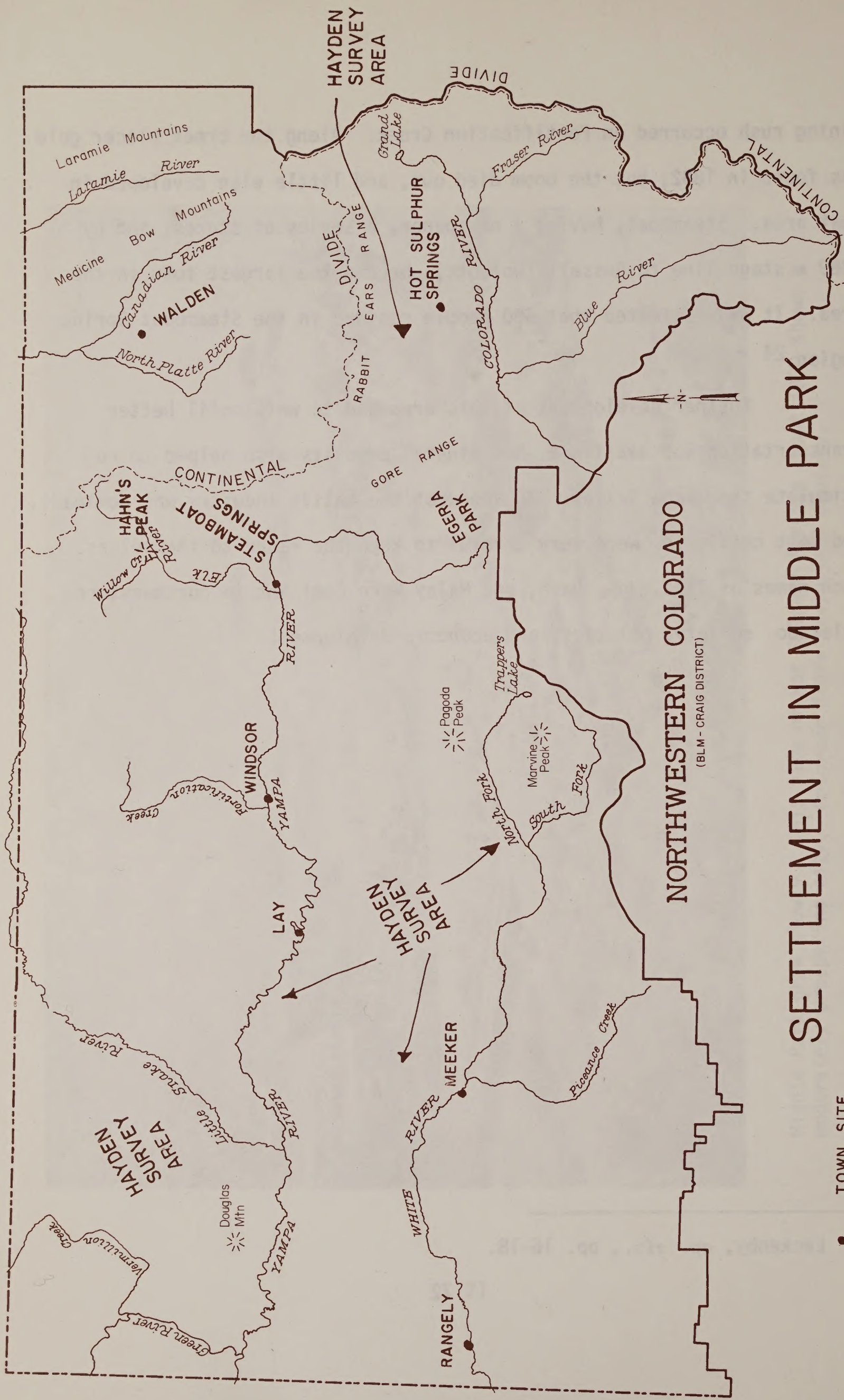
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<sup>24</sup> Leckenby, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-18.



W Y O M I N G

U T A H



• TOWN SITE

# SETTLEMENT IN MIDDLE PARK AND THE YAMPA VALLEY

NORTHWESTERN COLORADO

(BLM - CRAIG DISTRICT)

MAP 6



## Chapter VII



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATTLE AND SHEEP INDUSTRY

1868 - 1920







While the western slope near the Continental Divide was developing during the 1870s, the far western side of the state was also undergoing major changes. The construction of the Union Pacific railroad through Wyoming introduced new economics into the area. The crews needed beef, and while buffalo supplied by hunters was substantial, it was not nearly enough; beef was needed, and suppliers were quick to fill the demand.

The father of the cattle industry in Wyoming was Judge William Carter of Fort Bridger, who began to ship Texas Longhorns by rail to Fort Bridger in 1868, which had just been reached by the Union Pacific. He also imported a carload of Shorthorns to improve the breed.<sup>1</sup>

By 1871 the first cattle had been driven into northwest Colorado. The winter of 1871-72 had been one of the worst on record; few spots of open range were to be found on the western range. A New Mexican cattleman named George Baggs trailed 900 steers from southern Colorado into Brown's Hole in November; by spring he had not lost a single head. Baggs' partner, William Crawford, after talking it over with Baggs, decided to locate in the Brown's Hole region, and raise cattle on the lush grasses in the valley. This was the first entrance of cattle to northwestern Colorado. Brown's Hole was considered ideal for cattle raising, but it had its disadvantages as well. The "Hole" had long been used by fur trappers, and then later by

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<sup>1</sup> John Rolfe Burroughs, *Where the Old West Stayed Young*, (New York: Morrow, 1962), p. 10. See also: Ernest S. Osgood, *The Day of the Cattlemen* (University of Chicago Press, 1929) and Maurice Frink, *When Grass Was King*, (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1956).



bandits, who could hide in the valley with little fear of being caught. It was the watering place for several well-known outlaws, such as "Mexican Joe" Herrera and the Tip Gault Gang.<sup>2</sup>

Dangers notwithstanding, rancher-settlers found their way into Brown's Park. In 1874 W. G. Tittsworth and Griff Edwards drove several hundred head of cattle into the area, but were soon forced out by the partnership of Jesse and Valentine Hoy. The Hoyes were the dominant cattlemen in the Park by 1876, after the Baggs' group. Along with the big ranchers, there were modest settlers like Charles Crouse, "Bibleback Brown", Jimmie Reed, and Sam Bassett.

The Brown's Park region soon became notorious because of the constant rustling going on within the valley. The center of this illegal activity seemed to be the Bassett ranch. In addition to common cattle theft, other problems cropped up in the valley. It was a hide-out for several nationally famous gangs, including Butch Cassidy (George LeRoy Parker) and his gang, the Matt Warner Gang, Elza Lay, Cassidy's right-hand man, and numerous other desperados.<sup>3</sup>

The Cassidy gang worked out of the Park until the early 1900s when the Union Pacific Railroad, along with the famous "Rolling Posse" drove the group out of the country.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16 and p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-126

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127 and "Butch Cassidy's Early Exploits Recalled", *The Denver Post*, September 17, 1972



Brown's Park was not the only area that was opened to cattle. The Little Snake and Yampa Valleys became major cattle centers. George Baggs moved his outfit up the Little Snake into Wyoming, where he found the land between Fortification Creek and Savery Creek more to his liking. Here he put up a ranch building which eventually became the nucleus of Baggs, Wyoming. Baggs was the merchandising center of northwestern Colorado until the advent of Craig; it was almost dead-center between the Yampa Valley and the Union Pacific line at Rawlins. For many years Baggs was the primary cattle town of the region; it was finally superseded by Steamboat Springs when the Denver and Salt Lake Railroad reached that city in 1909. Baggs not only left his name on the map, so did his common-law wife, Maggie, after whom Maggie's Nipple, a butte in the northwestern corner, is named.<sup>5</sup>

Other little settlements, mainly ranches, sprang up in the area. Such places as Lay, Maybell, and Hayden became cattle centers, devoted to providing mail service and merchandise to cattlemen. The major cattlemen in the Yampa Valley were Ora Haley, the Carey Brothers, Jim Norvell, Pat Cullen, Si Dawson, and numerous others. They saw to it that their spreads took most of the available rangeland. The 1880's, 1890's, and early 1900's were the heydays of open range cattle. This meant that cattle were put out on the range year round, and in winter depended on native forage for survival; in some years this could be a very profitable venture, while in others, many cattlemen went broke. The Little Snake, Yampa, and White River valleys were generally good for range cattle, while the areas north and south of these

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<sup>5</sup> Burroughs, *op. cit.*, p. 11 and p. 81.



valleys were marginal. Where water was available regularly, there was usually no problem; but in the dry north, cattle fared poorly. North Park cattle were in much the same position as far northwestern cattle. This area was also open range country, and here, too, the hard winters often took terrible tolls on cattle. However, the industry survived, thanks to credit and high prices. Many a cattleman was wiped out, but he would go back again the next year while the bank collected anywhere from twelve to eighteen percent interest.<sup>6</sup>

The White River country was also a major cattle producing area. From Meeker, cattle were driven south through Douglas Canyon to Rifle, Colorado, where they were shipped on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad to Denver and points east. There was no road to Rifle until 1879, and the JQS cattle trail was used to drive the animals south.<sup>7</sup>

A great fear of western Colorado cattlemen was an invasion of sheep. The sheep industry was not new in Colorado. By the 1860's there were hundreds of thousands of head in the San Luis Valley and throughout southern Colorado. The cattlemen in the north considered themselves lucky that sheep had not moved onto their range. However, the inevitable was coming; the Meeker *Herald*, on January 14, 1888, warned that sheep were going to be brought in from Utah to use the White River grazing areas, including the Axial Basin and the Iles Ranch area.<sup>8</sup> Frightened cattlemen

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<sup>6</sup> As related in Both Burroughs and Osgood.

<sup>7</sup> CWA Interviews, Rio Blanco County, 1933. Document 31-32

<sup>8</sup> Meeker *Herald*, January 14, 1888, p. 1.



were prepared to meet the sheepmen at the border and turn them back, but the scare never materialized, and cattle remained supreme until the 1890's.

The first attempt to bring sheep into cattle country in the northwest corner came in 1894, when Jack Edwards from Wyoming tried to bring several thousand head into Routt County. Edwards claimed that he was being forced to move into Colorado, because Tom Kinney's 75,000 head of sheep had driven his 30,000 sheep out of Wyoming. A few local farmers favored the importation of sheep to get rid of a surplus of hay that had accumulated in the country, but the cattle barons refused to consider the admittance of sheep. A posse rode to the Wyoming border (near Dixon) and turned back the Edwards band.<sup>9</sup>

The primary complaint that cattlemen had about sheep was that they grazed to the roots, preventing cattle from getting enough grass, and not permitting the range to grow back. Cattlemen also argued that sheep and cattle could not mix together, and that the smell of sheep was so bad that the cattle panicked when sheep were near. About the only truth in the various stories was that sheep may graze to the roots.

The sheep wars that broke out in Routt county and later in Rio Blanco county came in the early 1900's. However, prior to this time, cattle raisers had problems with rustlers. Numerous cattlemen's associations were formed to deal with the problem; the most notorious example of the use of hired guns came with the formation of the Yampa Valley Cattle growers Association. This group hired Tom Horn to exterminate

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<sup>9</sup> Edward N. Wentworth, "Sheep Wars of the 90's in Northwest Colorado," in Denver Westerners *Brandbook*, (Denver: Denver Westerners, 1946), p. 135.





Cattlemen break camp and prepare to round up steers in summer mountain pasture.  
*Colorado State Historical Society*



suspected rustlers, which he did with relish. Horn killed Isom Dart, a well-known black cattleman; and Matt Rash, one of the founders of a cattlemen's association in Brown's Park, was ambushed by Horn.<sup>10</sup> In addition to cleaning up suspected cattle rustlers of the region, the cattlemen's associations tried to eliminate predators, and in some cases, competition. One of the best examples of the smaller ranchers ganging up on big outfits was the establishment of the Snake River Association, using the OVO brand. This group was dedicated to marketing on a cooperative basis, and competing with ranches such as the much hated Ora Haley Two Bar outfit.<sup>11</sup>

In 1902 the Brown's Park Ranchmen's Association was formed to combat grey wolves. They offered a bounty of \$20 per hide. In North Park an association was created for the same purpose in 1903.<sup>12</sup>

If cattlemen did not have enough problems with rustlers, sheepmen, and predators, another crisis occurred in 1891 when the White River Forest was created. This withdrew some 750,000 acres of prime Federal grazing land. Now cattlemen had to get grazing permits, and worse they had to compete with sheepmen for the right to use the land.<sup>13</sup> The White River Reserve was expanded in 1907 to 1,133,330 acres, which made grazing lands harder to obtain. The other factor that influenced the cattle industry

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Tyler, "F. R. Carpenter, Routt County, 1900-1920", (Fort Collins: Colorado State University, 1967) M.A. Thesis, p. 14 and in Burroughs, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-216 and pp. 216-225.

<sup>11</sup> Tyler, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Steven Payne, *Where The Rockies Ride Herd*, (Denver: Sage Books, 1965), p. 310.

<sup>13</sup> Tyler, *op. cit.*, p. 34.



was the Forest Homestead Act of 1906 by which forest lands could be filed on. Actually, due to the extreme care of the Agriculture Department, only 177,000 acres were ever taken out.<sup>14</sup>

Most of the intra-industry cattle conflicts were between smaller cattle outfits and large companies. By 1912 the Forest Service and the small cattle companies had been able to out-maneuver the large cattlemen, such as Ora Haley. This marked the end of open range operations. Carefully controlled grazing was now the rule.<sup>15</sup> In desperation, cattlemen (of the large companies) began to harrass settlers who were using grazing lands, (such as a colony of Swedes who were dry-land farming several mesas in Routt County), and sheep owners who were gaining grazing permits from the Forest Service.

The Routt County range wars reached new depths in 1911 with the George Woolley Sheep Massacre, when several hundred sheep were "rimrocked" by driving them over a cliff. The citizens of Routt County were outraged by the crime, and although the perpetrators were never caught, the sheep industry gained much sympathy. The war degenerated to the use of strychnine on sheep in 1913. By 1915 sheep were grazing in Routt National Forest (having been brought into Whiskey Park in 1910), and in 1920 the Northwest Sheepgrowers Association was formed for mutual protection.

The year 1920 marked the culmination of the sheep wars, when the Battle of Yellowjacket Pass occurred between sheepmen and cattle

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.



interests. The Colorado militia had to be called in to restore order.<sup>16</sup>

In 1934 the Taylor Grazing service was created to control grazing (and over-grazing) on public lands other than forest withdrawals. This service allotted land to cattlemen, sheepmen, and others for grazing purposes. For all practical purposes, the balance of public domain land was withdrawn in northwestern Colorado by this Act, and the era of the open range ended. In 1946 the General Land Office, the original caretaker of public lands, and the Taylor Grazing Service, were merged as the Bureau of Land Management. This organization continues to issue grazing permits and, for the most part, to keep the public domain from being overused.

The cattle industry in northwestern Colorado boomed when transportation was brought to the Yampa Valley. Prior to the coming of the Denver and Salt Lake Railroad, cattle were shipped to Rawlins, Wyoming, for trans-shipment on the Union Pacific, or herds were driven to Wolcott, Colorado, on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, where they were shipped to Denver and points east. The Wyoming route was generally preferred, as it was not as hard on cattle as trying to drive them down the Yampa Valley, over the Gore Range, and into the railhead. Losses were more severe using this route than they were when driven north. However, by 1909 Steamboat Springs had rail service, and it became the largest shipper in the northwestern corner. In fact, at one point it was the biggest cattle shipping point in the United States.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72 and p. 124 and p. 125.

<sup>17</sup> John Rolfe Burroughs, *Steamboat in the Rockies*, (Fort Collins: Old Army Press, 1974), p. 160.



One of the other major factors in the change in the cattle industry of this region was the introduction in the early 1900's of new breeding stock. Cattlemen found that the market demanded more than stringy Longhorns; most Texas cattle were Longhorns that had various defects, such as peculiar diseases which affected their ability to gain weight. Cattlemen in the northwest corner proceeded to import special breeds such as Shorthorns and Herefords to improve the weight-gaining ability of Longhorns.<sup>18</sup>

The innovation of using hay to winter-feed cattle came during the late 1890's and early 1900's in this region. Range cattle did not always survive winters due to lack of ground cover forage. There was an abundance of top quality wild hay in the Yampa Valley and in North Park; both of these areas were using this natural resource by 1900 to winter feed cattle. Further, North Park cattlemen learned that cattle close-herded, fed on hay, and not allowed to roam, would bring better prices on the market.

Thanks to the need for hay, a new industry was developed; wild hay was soon turned into a domestic product. North Park became famous for its quality hay, and thousands of tons were exported yearly from the Park to Denver and other eastern cities; even horsemen from Kentucky specified North Park hay. Balers came into use by the 1890's when a North Park cowboy named Joe Lawrence invented a way to use horses to pull a hayrack that would bale automatically; this revolutionized the industry and production soared. The Yampa Valley also produced good native hay.

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<sup>18</sup> Steve Payne, *op. cit.*, p. 178.



One of the basic cultural conflicts that arose between the cattle industry and sheep and farming interests was that of land ownership. Nearly all the grazing area involved was public land administered by the General Land Office (GLO). This public domain was open to anyone who could pay a filing fee, and who would stay on it for five years. When the first cattlemen came in, they simply assumed that grazing was possible and that no one would try to settle the area. For about twenty years this remained true, and cattlemen came to feel that the land they used was theirs, not public. As time wore on and the increased demands for land were heard, even marginal land was settled. Additionally, cattlemen were pressured by sheep raisers to use the land. Homesteaders claimed land that cattle interests felt was theirs by right of prior claim. The conflicts that arose were often violent, and cattle owners were loath to give up what they saw as theirs by right of first occupation.

The pressure increased and the attitude of most Americans at the time was that the land must be used; it must provide profit. After all, why not use land that was taken from the indolent Indians to its fullest extent? Cattlemen had already used the land by overgrazing and over-stocking. Now, just when the land was marginal for cattle, homesteaders and sheepmen wanted to finish its use. Sheep would graze what was left and leave a barren plain, while homesteaders would turn over the soil, try to plant it, and hope that a crop would grow. No matter how one viewed it, the land was not fit for this use. Perhaps the cattlemen realized this more than most, but the pressures of demand caused them to engage in open conflict with those who would occupy their ranges. This cultural



conflict lasted from the 1890's to 1920, when the open range cattle industry died of its own demand for lands that others wanted to develop more intensely.<sup>19</sup>

The cattle industry of northwestern Colorado was the mainstay of the economy until 1910. Since cattle were the prime commodity in the area, it was natural that cattlemen were key figures in politics, the economy, and in society. The land was cattle land, and the people were there because of cattle. In 1904 it was estimated that the value of cattle in Routt County was \$836,410, or more than half the total assessed value of the county.<sup>20</sup>

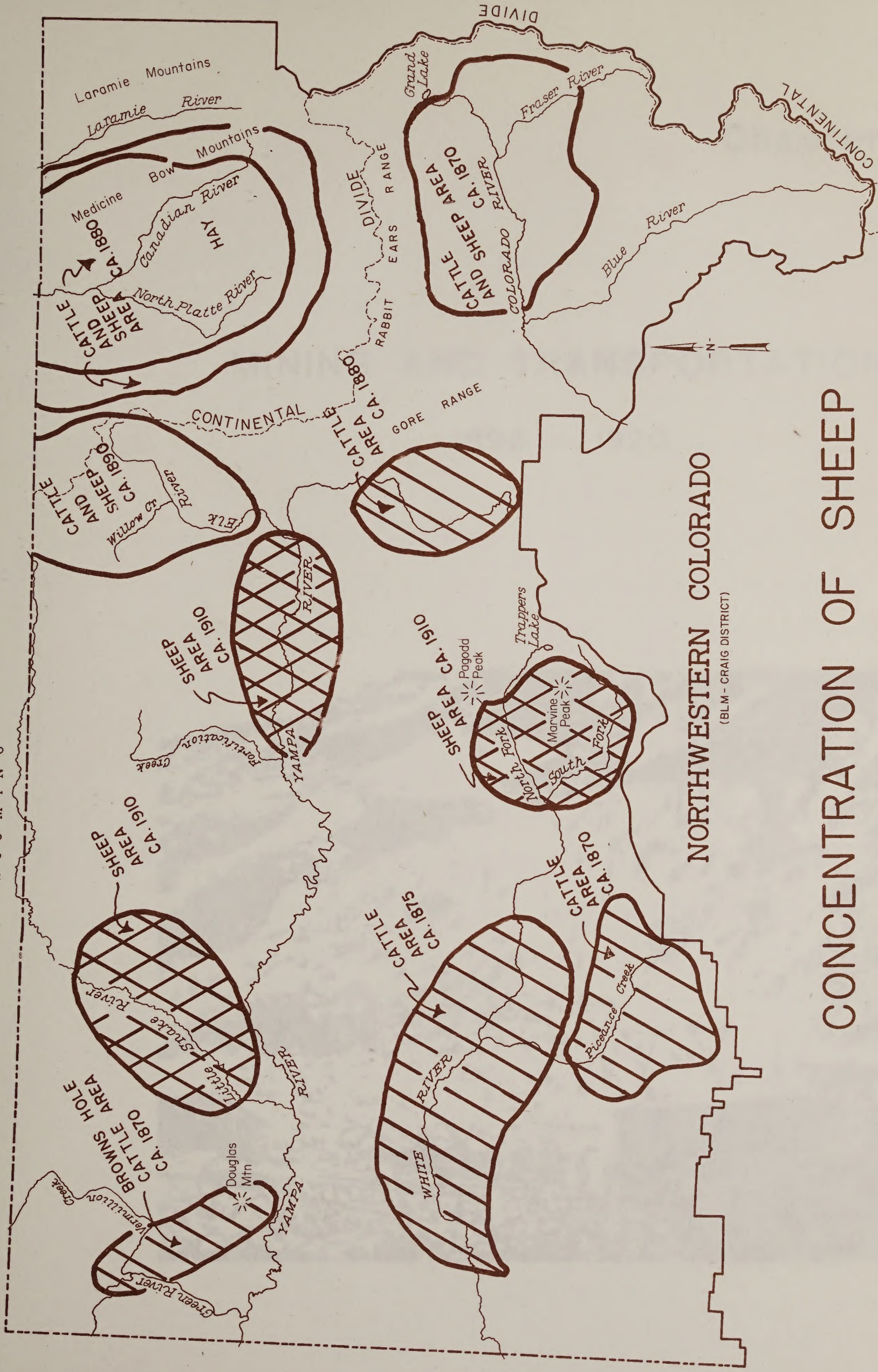
Cattle remained the largest single industry in the region until the 1920's when other industries such as coal, oil, and sheep threatened to overtake the cattle industry.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> Tyler, *op. cit.*, p. 15.





NORTHWESTERN COLORADO

(BLM - CRAIG DISTRICT)

# CONCENTRATION OF SHEEP AND CATTLE RANGES

CA. 1870-1920

MAP 7







## Chapter VIII

# MINING AND TRANSPORTATION

1890 - 1920









The western slope of Colorado experienced several mineral booms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These rushes were different than earlier ones, most of the minerals involved were not precious, as had been prevalent during the initial settlement of the state.

One of the bigger booms occurred in far western Colorado and in eastern Utah. The mineral, gilsonite, was discovered in the late 1870's by Samuel Gilson of Salt Lake City. Gilsonite is an oil and tar-based rock that can be processed into asphalt. At first the market was limited to industrial uses, such as lining beer barrels to make them waterproof. In 1889 Gilson, who had been mining the mineral since 1886 near Dragon, Utah, sold his holdings to the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company of St. Louis, who used gilsonite for beer barrels, and felt that it was better to own the source than to depend on a small operation such as Gilson's. In 1889 the Gilson Asphaltum Company was organized, and the Black Dragon Mine, near Dragon, Utah, was further developed. The major problem with gilsonite was that it was hard to ship; it was bulky and highly flammable. At first, mules carried the material to Salt Lake City; this proved too expensive and soon wagons were employed to haul it down to meet the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad near Mack, Colorado.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry E. Bender, *The Uintah Railway: The Gilsonite Route*, (Berkley, California: Howell-North, 1970), p. 16 and P. 21. See also: Richard A. Ronzio, "The Uintah Railway: The Gilsonite Road", in *Denver Westerners Brandbook*, (Denver: Denver Westerners, 1959), p. 41.



With a change of hands in management, new money was pumped into the industry. In 1903 the Barber Asphalt Company, owned by General Asphalt of New Jersey, capitalized the construction of a rail line from Dragon, Utah to Mack, Colorado. The Uintah railroad was to be narrow gauge, and it would be built at a cost of \$1.75 million, solely to haul gilsonite. The line which ran south from Dragon, over Baxter Pass and on to the Grand Valley, was finished by 1906.<sup>2</sup> In that same year, a toll road company was incorporated at Dragon to build roads to Vernal, Utah, and Rangely, Colorado, in order to provide stage service.<sup>3</sup> It was hoped that the Uintah Railroad would be extended to both of these places later. In 1913 a survey was made for an extension to Meeker, Colorado, but nothing came of the effort.<sup>4</sup>

The rail line, sixty-two miles long, used especially built Shay locomotives to pull flatcars of gilsonite over the long and steep Baxter Pass route. Along the right of way little towns and settlements sprang up, including places like Urado, East Vac, Columbine, Carbonera, Clarkton and Mack.<sup>5</sup> The line ran from Watson, Utah, to Mack, Colorado, using the twisting Baxter Pass route. Hundreds of thousands of tons of the mineral were hauled out and then processed. The asphalt was used not only for industrial purposes, but much of it went into streets across the nation when the age of highway building came in the 1920's.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ronzio, *op. cit.*, 50.

<sup>3</sup> Bender, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.



The Uintah Railway was unique in that it was built for one product, and gilsonite supported it. The railway also ran passenger service from Watson to Mack on a regular schedule. This was the first rail transportation on a north-south basis in western Colorado.

Transporting gilsonite was tricky; it was so flammable that wet canvas sacks had to be used to keep the engine's sparks from setting it afire. In addition, wrecks from runaways, bad track, and the like were common. During the 1920's and 1930's the advent of better roads and heavy trucks made the railroad obsolete, and it was finally abandoned in 1938; the old roadbed has been converted into a jeep road and is still in use.<sup>7</sup> In 1957 a slurry pipeline was built from Watson, Utah to Mack, Colorado, and the gilsonite industry continued to be a major factor in far western Colorado's economy.<sup>8</sup>

Mining in North Park was revitalized in the late 1890's. Gold mining had taken place on Independence Mountain since the 1870's but it was never a paying proposition. However, a few miners worked the area and tried to make a living. While prospecting this region, copper was found in the far northwest corner of the Park. A boom ensued and the town of Pearl, Colorado was built. This copper boom was not long lasting; it was over by 1915, but it did much to stimulate growth in North Park. Copper was also discovered in the Centennial Valley (Wyoming and Colorado), and a minor rush occurred there too.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>9</sup> Jackson County Library, Scrapbook, MSS in Colorado State Historical Society, Denver, Colorado, n.d. unpaginated. 3 volumes.







The other major mineral discovery in North Park occurred in 1890, when the Riach Brothers discovered coal near Coalmont, Colorado. Large quantities of this fuel were to be found in North Park, but development had to wait until transportation for it could be built. The coal was used only locally until about 1911, when the Laramie, Hahn's Peak and Pacific Railroad was built from Laramie, Wyoming to Walden, Colorado. The Laramie Hahn's Peak was projected to go down the Elk River Valley to Steamboat Springs, on to Craig, then to Meeker, down the White River to Utah, and on into Salt Lake City. The road was actually built south to the Centennial Valley, reaching that area in 1906.<sup>10</sup> It was extended to Walden by 1911, and finally the line reached Coalmont in that same year. The coal reserves were thus tapped and the railroad brought cheap transportation to North Park.

The railroad had hoped that the Centennial and Pearl copper booms and the Coalmont coal fields would provide revenue for operation. As it turned out, none of these sources except the coal fields proved to be of lasting worth; if there was a single major source of revenue, it was cattle and freight. The Laramie Hahn's Peak and Pacific suffered from chronic financial troubles, and went through several name changes. In 1907 it became the Laramie and Routt County Railway; in 1914 it was called the Colorado, Wyoming, and Eastern Railroad; and in 1924 the name was changed

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<sup>10</sup> Frank R. Hallenback, *The Laramie Plains Line*, (Denver: Sage Books, 1960), p. 10. See also: *Laramie, Hahn's Peak and Pacific Railroad*, n.l.,d.d.). This is an excellent promotional book put out by the LHP&P as a prospectus in 1911. It contains many excellent photographs of North Park including Pearl, Centennial, and Walden in 1911. Other sources include: Adah Bailey, *History of Jackson County, Colorado*, (Walden: Jackson County *Star*, 1947) and Eva B. Mariette, "Memories of North Park", Xerox scrapbook, MS in Colorado State Historical Society, Denver, Colorado, n.d. unpaginated.



to the Northern Colorado and Eastern Railroad. That same year it was re-incorporated into the Laramie, North Park and Western, which it remained until 1951 when the Union Pacific mercifully bought it out. The line remains today as the Union Pacific and still serves North Park.<sup>11</sup>

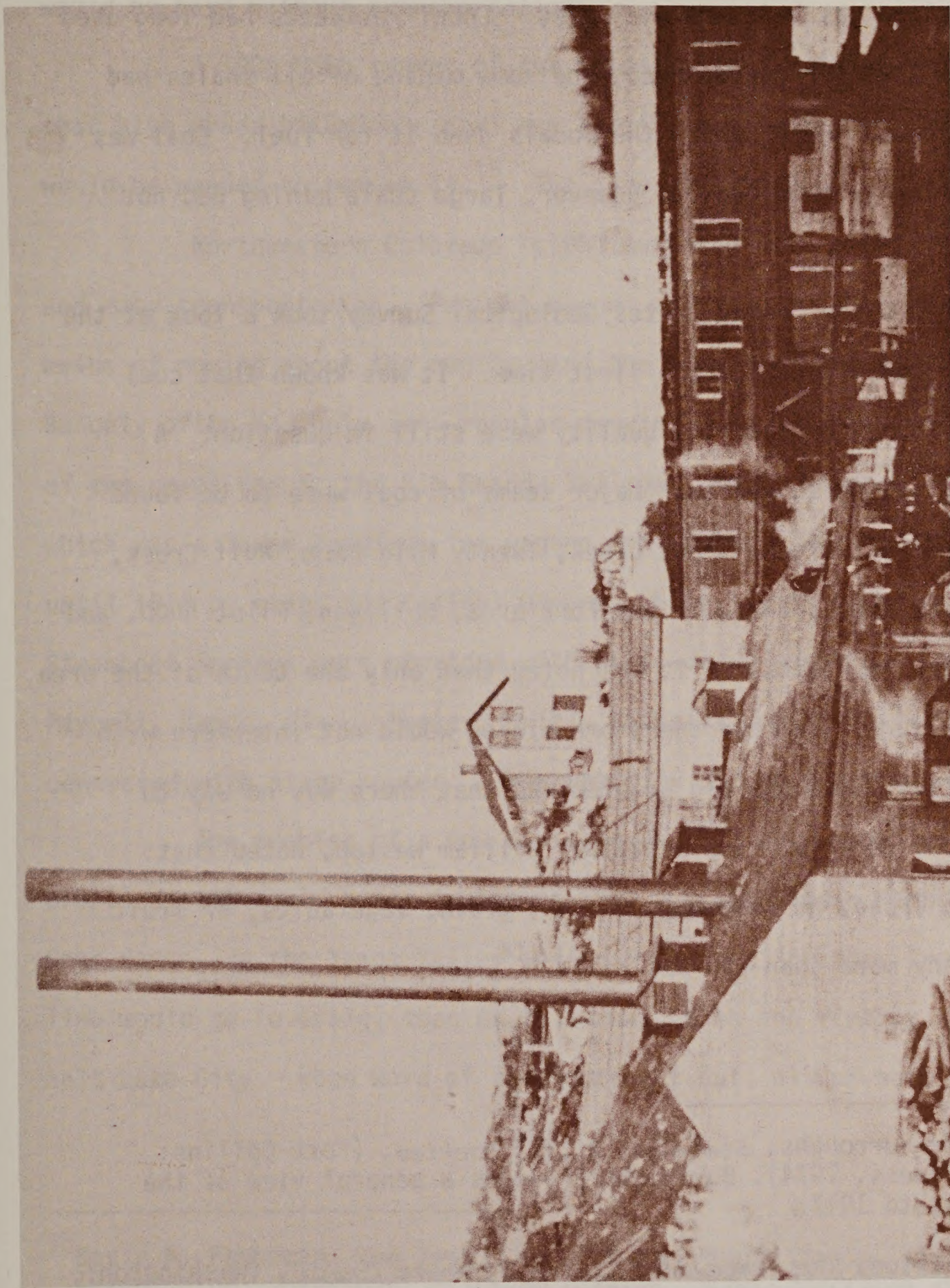
North Park was provided with rail service rather late; the only real benefit enjoyed by North Parkers was that freight service was improved. The population of the area grew to a point that in 1912 the Park was made into a separate county. Jackson county was carved out of Grand County and the seat was designated as Walden. A courthouse was built in 1912, and Walden became the leading town in the Park. Smaller towns such as Cowdrey and Pinkhampton, were originally ranches that became post offices, while towns like Coalmont and Pearl were mining towns that acted as service centers. North Park's development after 1915 was primarily agricultural, with cattle and hay being the most important products. Coal production was marginal, but the discovery and tapping of this resource was significant in that it marked potential development in other areas of western Colorado.

The far northwest corner of Colorado mineral potential remained undeveloped except for a few minor booms. At Blue Mountain copper and some gold deposits were found, but they were far too small to provide the stimulus for a rush. Equally, gold placers along the Little Snake River and Fortification Creek were nearly worthless. Only Hahn's Peak continued as a viable mining area, and by 1900 even it was rapidly fading. However, the turn of the century saw a great interest in other reserves developing. Hayden in 1876 had noted the existence of coal, oil and

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<sup>11</sup> As related in Hallenback, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-20.





The coal mines of the Yampa Valley produced into the 1920's. This mine, at Oak Creek, was closed down in the late 20's. *Colorado State Historical Society.*



oil shale; due to the lack of need and/or transportation, these fields were not tapped. By 1900 the demand for coal had risen to the point that the western slope was being re-evaluated. Local residents had long used coal from the Streeter Canyon area, and some mining of oil shales had taken place around Meeker where the locals used it for fuel. Coal was also being mined in this region; however, large scale mining had not taken place.<sup>12</sup>

In 1906 the United States Geological Survey took a look at the Yampa Valley coal fields for the first time. It was known that coal existed, but the extent and the quality were still in question. A survey of the valley showed that major seams of coal were to be found in the areas of Oak Creek, Trout Creek, Twenty Mile Park, Wolf Creek, Sage Creek, Dry Creek, the Williams Fork area, Wollihan, Pilot Knob, and on the Flat Top Mountains.<sup>13</sup> It was noted that only one tenth of the area was in agricultural use, and therefore mining would not interfere with other industries. But the big problem was that there was no way to remove the coal cheaply. The surveyor, William Weston, noted that: "Without a railroad, no shipments of hay, grain, vegetables, or fruit can be made any more than can the coals."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Rolfe Burroughs, *Steamboat in the Rockies*, (Fort Collins: Old Army Press, 1974). Burroughs provides a general view of the area prior to 1917.

<sup>13</sup> William Weston, *The Yampa Coal Fields of Routt County*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), p. 4 and p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



Later report of the USGS in the area confirmed that the same problem existed; there were minerals in abundance but removing them would be hard without transportation.

A 1906 USGS survey of the Yampa Valley by Nevin Fenneman concluded that high grade bituminous coal was readily available, but that a railroad would be needed to remove it.<sup>15</sup> The same old story; no transportation.

Northwestern Colorado in 1900 suffered from a total lack of cheap and easy transportation. Freight wagons and stagecoaches provided the only means of moving about the region, and the more isolated spots such as Rangely often had only semi-regular service. As has been noted, most of the roads ran to the Rio Grande Railroad, terminating at Wolcott, which was a large terminus for wagons and stages. North Park was served until 1913 by stage and freight wagons, while places like Craig and Steamboat Springs were provided with horse-drawn service. Craig, Lay, Maybell, Baggs, Dixon, Meeker, Axial, Rangely, and Vernal were all interconnected with stage routes. This was slow and costly transport.

The promise of a new day came in 1903 when a new railroad was proposed. It would begin in Denver, run through Middle Park, across the Gore Range, up the Yampa Valley and to Steamboat Springs; from there the line would go to Craig, then on to Vernal, Utah and finally terminate in Salt Lake City. When word of the route got out; all of northwestern

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<sup>15</sup>Nevin M. Fenneman, *The Yampa Coal Fields, Routt County, Colorado*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), describes the area and draws conclusions as to its worth.



Colorado was excited. Businessmen, cattlemen, miners, everyone saw the coming of a railroad as the answer to all of their problems.<sup>16</sup>

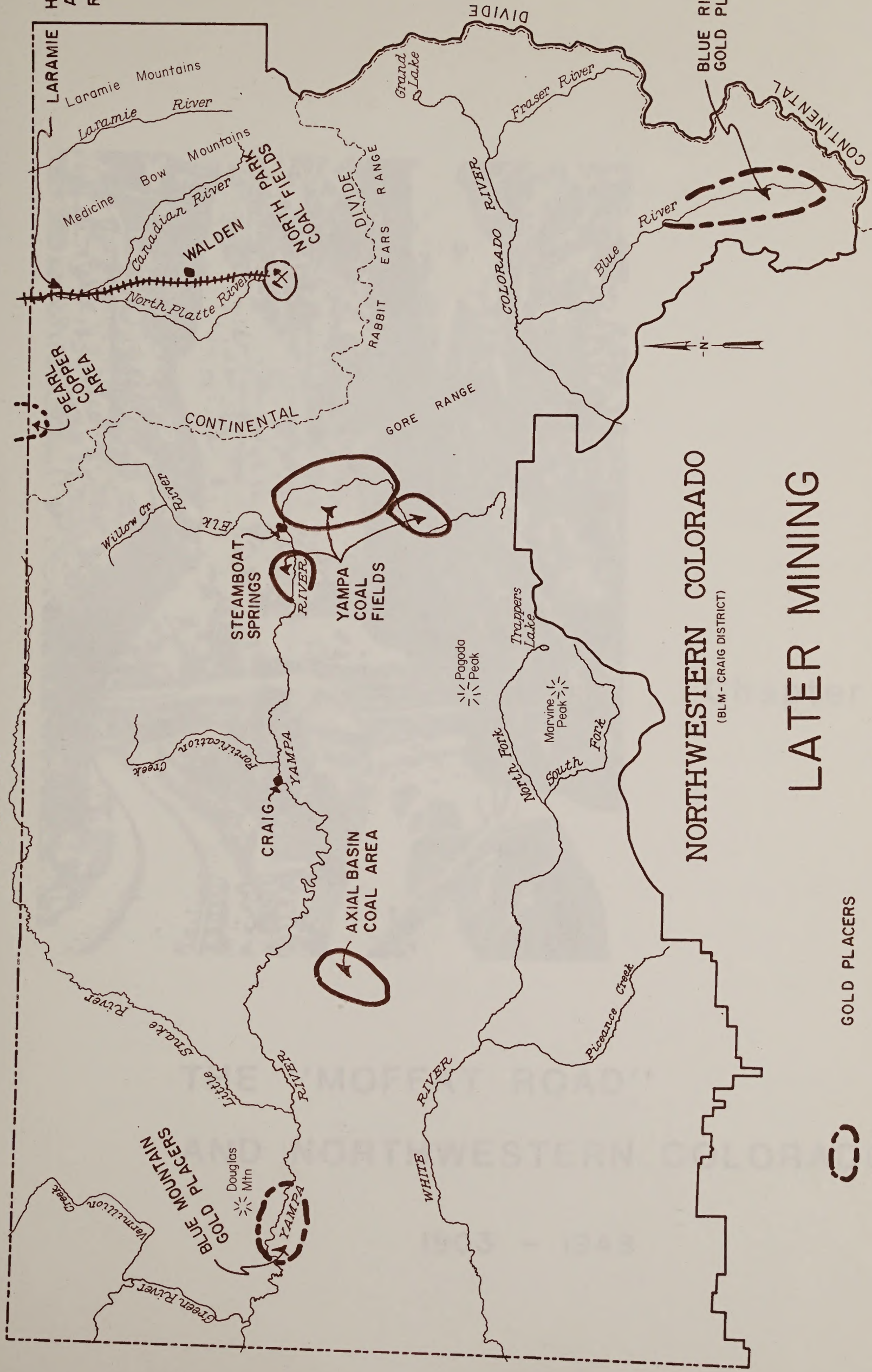
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<sup>16</sup> See: Thomas Tonge, *The "Moffat Road"*, (Denver: n.p., 1906) for a glowing description of what a railroad will mean to northwestern Colorado.



W Y O M I N G

HAHN'S PEAK  
AND PACIFIC  
RAILROAD



GOLD PLACERS  
COAL FIELDS  
COPPER AREA  
TOWN SITE  
RAILROAD

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MAP 8









## Chapter IX

# THE "MOFFAT ROAD" AND NORTHWESTERN COLORADO

1903 - 1948







David Halliday Moffat came to Colorado in 1863 from Omaha, Nebraska, penniless, having lost his fortune in a promotional scheme in that city. Arriving in Denver, he worked among the miners and soon found that there was a need for banking in the newly created city. In partnership with John Evans, Moffat went to work for the First National Bank of Denver. Nearly every railroad scheme from the Colorado Central to the Rio Grande had Moffat involved in it. Moffat also became interested in mining to the extent that he had holdings in Caribou, Leadville, Central City, and other major mining centers of Colorado. From these ventures, Moffat amassed a fortune that was estimated at some \$9 million by 1902.<sup>1</sup>

In his sixties Moffat decided that the final project of his career would be the building of a standard gauge railroad directly through the Rocky Mountains, across the northwestern corner of the state, and on to Salt Lake City. Construction was begun in 1903 with a line built toward Coal Creek Canyon. Then Moffat had to make a decision; either he could build a major tunnel (about three miles long) through the mountains at an estimated cost of \$7,000,000, which would exhaust his fortune and end the railroad, or he could go over the Continental Divide and conserve his resources. He chose the latter

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<sup>1</sup> See: Edgar C. McMechen, *The Moffat Tunnel of Colorado*, (Denver: Wahlgren Publishing Co., 1927), 2 Volumes; Edward T. Bollinger, *Rails That Climb: The Story of the Moffat Road*, (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Rydal Press, 1950) and Harold Boner, *The Giant's Ladder: David H. Moffat and His Railroad*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Kalmbach Publishing Co., 1962).



course. In doing so, Moffat built over Rollins Pass and down into Middle Park. The railroad, the Denver Northwestern and Pacific, reached the Park by 1905, and for the first time cheap transportation was available.<sup>2</sup> The citizens of Kremmling, Hot Sulphur Springs, Fraser, Granby, and Grand Lake were delirious with pleasure at the road's arrival; however, the joy was short-lived when the road ran into financial problems.

When the railroad reached Hot Sulphur Springs, Moffat found that more capital was needed. He appealed to his friends in Denver who, while sympathetic, could not help him. He needed some \$100 million in fresh capital. Moffat then went to New York where he tried to raise money; this effort was unsuccessful, thanks to the machinations of men like Jay Gould, who saw a threat in the new road. With eastern capital shut off, Moffat tried to get Belgian money involved, but to no avail. The Moffat Road was stopped at Hot Sulphur Springs in 1907, and the long-sought Yampa coal fields were still fifty miles distant.<sup>3</sup> Moffat managed to raise enough money to continue construction through the Gore Canyon, up the Yampa Valley, and on to Oak Creek where the first real revenues for the road were tapped. Coal began to flow east toward Denver and the road seemed financially safer. The line was then extended north to Steamboat Springs, arriving at that city in 1909. The citizens of the region flocked to the outskirts of town, where they swarmed over the

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<sup>2</sup> Boner, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> Bollinger, *op. cit.*, p. 309 and Boner, *Ibid.*, p. 137.





The historic Rio Grande *Zephyr* emerges from one of  
David Moffat's engineering triumphs - The Gore Canyon.

*Photo by F. J. Athearn*



first train to use the new tracks. A brass band played patriotic tunes, and the town gave the railroad its station.<sup>4</sup>

Steamboat Springs became the terminus of the Denver, Northwestern and Pacific, for at this point the railroad ran out of money. It had cost \$12,544,573.55 to get to Steamboat Springs, and Moffat had exhausted all of his resources.<sup>5</sup> He died in 1913, penniless, and with a railroad that went nowhere. The Yampa coal fields were the only real potential sources of revenue for the road.

In that year Newman Erb, a well-known railroad manager from the east, became General Manager of the re-incorporated Denver and Salt Lake Railroad. Under his leadership the Moffat Road was able to keep rolling. In fact, Erb extended the mainline to Craig, Colorado, arriving at that town in 1913. While it was a valiant effort at extension, the Craig line could not save the road. The only real benefit was that the Yampa Valley was served by rail, and Craig became the new cattle shipping center.

The D & SL was saved by World War I. By August, 1917, the road had gone into receivership, and things were so bad that in January, 1918, the men walked off their jobs, refusing to return until back wages were paid.<sup>6</sup> However, the war and the demand for Yampa coal kept the railroad alive until 1919. Revenues were high, and the wartime United States Railway Administration (a board that "nationalized" United States railways) pumped millions of dollars into the dying Moffat road.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Rolfe Burroughs, *Steamboat in the Rockies*, (Fort Collins, Colorado: Old Army Press, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Bollinger, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

<sup>6</sup> Boner, *op. cit.*, p. 167 and p. 176.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176 and p. 181.



In 1921 the railroad applied for abandonment, but was refused, mostly because of the outcries of the population of northwestern Colorado. The Denver and Salt Lake remained in bankruptcy. There were many reasons for the poor condition of the road: the most important factor was that coal revenues never met expenses. Additionally, many cattlemen soon found that shipping to Denver was dangerous; cattle died along the way from cold and poor service. The most serious problem faced by the Moffat Road was Rollins Pass; at nearly 11,000 feet, this was one of the most difficult rail passes in the world, and during the winter it was virtually impossible to keep open. The Rollins Pass route was the cause of cattle kills (in stock cars), accidents, passengers being stranded for days, and any number of other problems. Middle Parkers were constantly being called out to help dig out stranded trains. It was clear that Rollins Pass had to be eliminated.

The idea of a tunnel was hardly new. However, it was considered too expensive to drill through the Rockies. A tunnel bond issue came up in 1919 and was narrowly defeated by Colorado voters. This seemed to end the demand for a rail tunnel. The Pueblo flood of 1921 stimulated new interest in a tunnel. Flood control was needed and supporters maintained that a diversion tunnel could help in this effort. Further, water from the Colorado River was needed to keep Denver alive; hence, the citizens of Denver were convinced that a combination tunnel would be useful.<sup>8</sup> In 1922 a new bond issue was floated in the sum of \$9,000,000 and passed. The Moffat Tunnel was authorized and the western slope "boomed" again.

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<sup>8</sup> McMechen, *op. cit.*, p. 127 and p. 161, Vol. 1.



Construction on the Moffat Tunnel began in 1923, with a camp being built at East Portal, Colorado. From there the Rockies were penetrated. It took four years and over \$40,000,000 to drill a six-mile tunnel to carry both water and rail traffic. The Moffat Tunnel provided more direct and certainly more reliable transportation into the northwest corner of the state.<sup>9</sup>

The Denver and Salt Lake Railroad, while having little invested in the Moffat Tunnel, was still in serious trouble. During the 1920's the trackage was leased by the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad. Service into the northwest continued, but not nearly on the scale that had been projected. In 1931 the Denver and Rio Grande got permission to build the Dotsero Cutoff, running from Bond, Colorado to the Rio Grande's mainline at the mouth of Glenwood Canyon. With this short-cut, the Rio Grande had a direct mainline from Denver to Salt Lake City.

The use of the Moffat Road saved 181 miles. The line into Craig became a branch service line and northwestern Colorado languished once again.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most interesting factors in the coming of a railroad to northwestern Colorado was the excitement that occurred. As was typical of Colorado, the promise of opening the corner caused a "boom". From 1906 until the late 1920's, constant efforts were made to promote the region.

Thomas Tonge, a Denver promoter of Colorado, wrote in 1906 that "the Yampa and White Rivers in northwestern Colorado have as yet only

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>10</sup> Bonner, *op. cit.*, p. 195 and p. 201.



been very partially utilized for irrigation purposes, but with the advent of the Moffat Road, now being built from Denver to Salt Lake City, and the settling up of the tributary country, irrigation systems will be constructed."<sup>11</sup> Clearly, Tonge was trying to promote agriculture in the area. He provided statistics that showed the great potential of the corner, while at the same time pointing out that only the railroad would make development possible.<sup>12</sup> The Denver, Northwestern and Pacific hired the eminent geologist, R. D. George, to study the coal fields of the Yampa Valley and Moffat County. George concluded that there were minerals such as coal, clay, copper, carnotite (uranium), asphaltic sands, gold, gypsum, iron, oil and gas throughout the region, and all that was needed was transportation. Naturally, the railroad was delighted to use such information for its promotions.<sup>13</sup> A series of USGS reports were put out between 1915 and 1925 which were used to help promote the region. The USGS made a careful study of the land and concluded that there was great potential, but little transportation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Tonge, *Handbook of Colorado Resources*, (Denver: Smith-Brooks Printing Co., 1906), pp. 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> R. D. George, *The Denver and Salt Lake Railroad: Coal, Oil Shale and Hydrocarbons*, (Denver, n.p., 1918), pp. 8-26.

<sup>14</sup> See Hoyt S. Gayle, *Coal Fields of Northwestern Colorado and Northeastern Utah*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910); E. G. Woodruff, *Oil Shale of Northwestern Colorado and Northeastern Utah*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914); A. L. Beekly, *Geology and Coal Resources of North Park, Colorado*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1915); Dean E. Winchester, *Oil Shale in Northwestern Colorado and Adjacent Areas*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916); Marius R. Campbell, *The Twenty Mile Park District of the Yampa Coal Field, Routt County, Colorado*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923); and E. T. Hancock, *Geology and Coal Resources of the Axial and Monument Butte Quadrangles, Moffat County, Colorado*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925).



Another "boom" occurred when the Moffat Tunnel was proposed. The citizens of the Yampa Valley saw the tunnel as the answer to all their problems; with a tunnel, the line to Salt Lake would be completed. With this in mind Steamboat Springs, under the leadership of Charles Leckenby, began a promotional campaign to lure people into the valley. A booklet entitled, "An Imperial Empire: Northwestern Colorado" described the area as having major mining at Oak Creek, an oil gusher at Hamilton, and head lettuce being raised in the Yampa Valley and the Granby areas. The town of Oak Creek was cited as being so progressive that it had a soft drink bottling plant, a cigar factory, and a packing house, in addition to a saw mill and a creamery. It was noted that Kremmling had a new high school, and that Granby was a major agricultural area.<sup>15</sup>

In 1925 the Moffat Tunnel League was founded to promote the area. Not only was the tunnel considered important, but so was the commercial promotion of the Yampa Valley. In 1925 the league put out a "Resource Edition" of the Moffat Tunnel District Development Association's publication. In it the dairy, oil, cattle, sheep, lettuce, and mineral industries were heavily promoted. The next year's "Resource Edition" pushed many of the same things that the 1924 edition had "boomed", even Oak Creek put out a "Centennial Issue" which was a copy of the 1926 "Resource Edition".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Federated Commercial Clubs of Northwestern Colorado, "An Imperial Empire: Northwestern Colorado", June, 1924, *Steamboat Pilot*, Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

<sup>16</sup> See: Moffat Tunnel District Development Association, "Resource Edition", (Steamboat Springs, Colorado: *Steamboat Pilot*, 1926), and Moffat Tunnel League, "Resource Edition", (Steamboat Springs, Colorado: *Steamboat Pilot*, 1927).



Other towns got into the act. As early as 1912, the town of Hayden published a booklet that touted that city as the "center of Northwest Colorado". Agriculture, mining and cattle raising were said to be the major industries, and Hayden could provide all necessary services. The Moffat Road, said Hayden, would provide the needed transportation.<sup>17</sup>

As usual, the intensive promotion of the region did little good, for while agriculture remained stable, the lettuce industry collapsed, and the coal boom gave out - causing a series of towns such as Phippsburg, Oak Creek, and Yampa to lose population. The Upper Yampa Valley fell into a depression during the 1920's.

One of the benefits of the coming of the Moffat Road was that subsidiary industries developed to help supply the construction crews. Towns such as Fraser, Tabernash, Granby, Kremmling, Hot Sulphur Springs, and the Yampa Valley towns became supply centers, and by and large gained their present populations at this time. An example of this trend was seen in the development of a timber industry in Middle Park. A number of companies were formed to provide bridge timbers, ties, and other needs for the railroad. Charles Wolcott, in 1905, founded the Rocky Mountain Lumber Company. It was capitalized at \$100,000 and the town of Monarch, Colorado, grew out of the company. Also in 1905 the Rocky Mountain Railway Company was incorporated to carry lumber from Granby to Monarch.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Oak Creek *Times*, "Centennial Edition", Volume 18, Number 23, March 25, 1926.

<sup>18</sup> See: Frank Wolcott, "Monarch of Grand County", *Westerners Brandbook*, Denver, 1954.



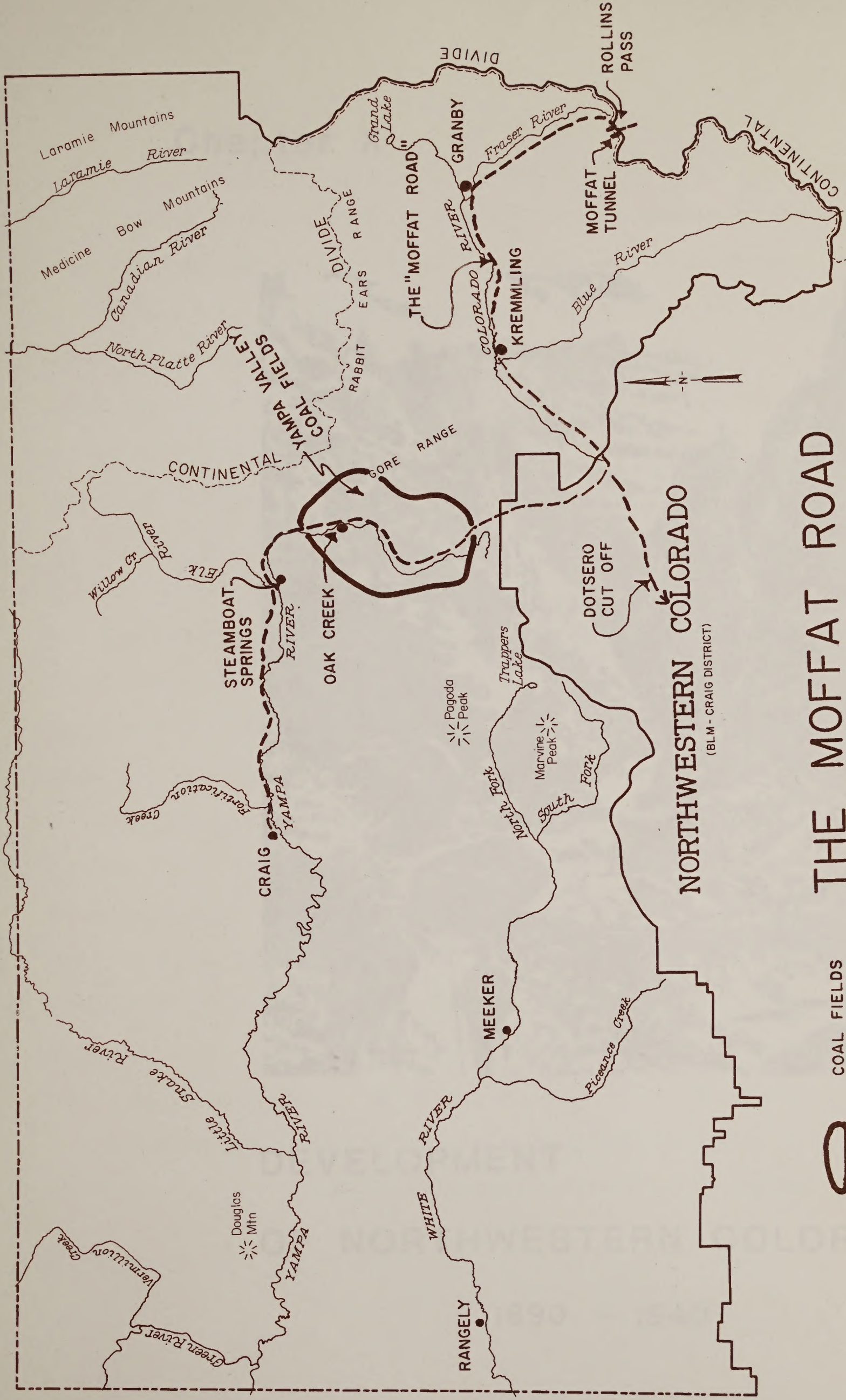
After the railroad went through into the Yampa Valley, the lumber business gave out in Middle Park. In 1908 Rocky Mountain Lumber went out of business after a fire destroyed the mill; the fate of most of the other lumber companies that came with the Moffat Road was as dismal.<sup>19</sup> The supply towns tended to languish, but they never entirely faded away. Land development took place and it seemed as if the region would develop, but this was only a dream.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.



W Y O M I N G



U T A H

NORTHWESTERN COLORADO

(BLM - CRAIG DISTRICT)

THE MOFFAT ROAD

COAL FIELDS

TOWN SITE

RAILROAD

MAP 9







## Chapter X



# DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHWESTERN COLORADO

1890 - 1940







The most recent stage of development in northwestern Colorado came in a fifty-year period. From 1890 to 1940 towns were founded; natural resources were exploited; and vast areas of the public domain were withdrawn from open range used by homesteaders and cattlemen. The period was one of consolidation and reorganization; the old frontier rule of "he who got there first" was no longer in effect. Now settlers had to deal with corporations, governmental agencies, and the law.

After the removal of the Utes in 1880, townsite companies began to organize towns within northwestern Colorado in anticipation of the rush that would come because the land was now open. Additionally, better transportation routes from Wyoming helped to stir interest in settlement. In 1882 the town of Rangely was founded, replacing the older town of Golden City, which had been located at the mouth of Cottonwood Creek. Steamboat Springs, as has been mentioned, was founded in 1885 by James Crawford, while in 1889 the Craig Land and Mercantile Company was formed. That year 320 acres were purchased from Frank Ranney by Frank Russell, Jerry Hill, and the Reverend W. B. Craig for \$2,500. Additionally, a Mr. Barkley sold 160 acres to the company for \$1,500.<sup>1</sup> W. H. Tucker, a partner, laid out the streets, and in 1892 a hotel was erected. The general store at Hayden was bought out and moved to Craig; it was sold to the Hugus system in 1893 or 1894. The Craig townsite was obviously designed to make a profit for the

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<sup>1</sup> CWA Interviews, Moffat County, 1933-1934, MSS, Pamphlet 356.



promoters. While the town grew slowly, it was hardly a money making operation. As one old timer put it: "Nobody got rich out of the Craig Company".<sup>2</sup>

Another example of townbuilding was the creation of Hayden, Colorado, in 1894 when the townsite was laid out by William Walker. Prior to this time, Hayden had been a little trading post catering to first the Indians, and later to cattlemen. Walker's townsite company proposed to develop and sell property, and in 1906 the town was actually incorporated. It was the fourth or fifth largest town in the Yampa (Bear) River Valley.<sup>3</sup>

It was built to compete with Craig as the "capital" of the northwest. The two towns fought each other for trade and other services for the cattlemen of the area. Steamboat Springs, being somewhat isolated in the Elk River Valley, remained a supply point for the eastern regions.

In 1912 Hahn's Peak finally lost status as county seat of Routt County. A fire in 1910 wiped out most of the town and, under great pressure, the county seat was shifted to Steamboat Springs. Craig, Hayden, Meeker, Axial, Maybell, and Lay were all in the competition.<sup>4</sup> Craig got its way in 1914 when Moffat County was carved from Routt, and it became the county seat of the new district, much to the dismay of Hayden, the other prime contender.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1933-1934.

<sup>3</sup> Hayden High School, "Early History of Routt County", MS, Hayden Colorado, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> CWA Interview, *op. cit.*, Pamphlet 356.



One of the more interesting features of economic development in the region was the J. W. Hugus chain stores. These stores were located in Meeker (headquarters), Craig, Hayden, Palisade, Clifton, Rifle, Wolcott, Axial, Pagoda, Walden, Granby, and Steamboat Springs; also Rawlins and Wamsutter, Wyoming.<sup>6</sup> The chain operated general stores throughout the region, serving cattlemen, miners, and settlers alike. The Hugus chain, incorporated in 1889, was the largest single corporation in northwest Colorado. It had seven auxiliary banks, and it owned the Wyoming Transportation Company, which acted as a freight service for the Hugus stores, and provided stage and freight lines for the western part of the state.<sup>7</sup> The Hugus chain folded in the 1930's, a victim of the depression, but the company was well-remembered, for it helped many struggling settlers or cattlemen survive. It was said of the Hugus chain: "They were almost the backbone of this country. They gave unlimited credit to the farmers...".<sup>8</sup>

Meeker was also the home of the Harp Transportation Company founded in 1887. At first the company was a stage line run by Simp Harp of Meeker between that city and New Castle, Colorado. The Harp, Wright, and Daum Stage Company sold out to "Kit" Carson (no relation to the well-known Christopher "Kit" Carson of mountain and political fame) in 1888 when he started running stages from Glenwood Springs to Meeker. However

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<sup>6</sup> CWA Interviews, Rio Blanco County, 1933-1934, MSS.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1933-1934.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1933-1934



the Carson stage line was so unreliable that it soon folded.<sup>9</sup> Simp Harp began a new stage company that ran to Rifle, and it continued to serve Meeker by horse and stage until 1915, when Harp bought a Cadillac motor car which he used for service. The Harp company has continued to serve the White River Valley, and it is the oldest continuous non-rail transportation company in the state of Colorado.<sup>10</sup>

As early as 1880 a deer and elk meat industry developed in North Park. One pioneer family, the Rhea's of North Park, provided over 2,000 pounds of dried elk and deer meat to Denver and Cheyenne butchers.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, a major elk meat industry was in operation in the Meeker area. Here, thousands of pounds of elk meat was shipped during the late 1880's and early 1890's to Denver, Cheyenne, and points east. This business died out prior to 1900, because the slaughter of elk so depleted the herds, that areas once swarming with the animals were no longer profitable for hunting.<sup>12</sup>

Another early industry of the region that has continued to grow was the hunting and fishing business. For many years the elk, deer, antelope, and other game animals had been hunted. However, the region got national publicity in 1901 when Vice President Theodore Roosevelt came to Meeker and hunted in the nearby mountains, bagging a mountain

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<sup>9</sup> Meeker *Herald*, March 17, 1888

<sup>10</sup> CWA Interviews, Rio Blanco County, 1933, Document 108.

<sup>11</sup> U. S. Forest Service, *History of Routt Forest*, (Steamboat Springs, Colorado. n.p., 1972), p. 242.

<sup>12</sup> CWA Interviews, Rio Blanco County, 1933



lion. The Roosevelt visit provided the stimulus needed for the promotion of a hunting industry.<sup>13</sup> The Trapper's Lake area, the Flattop Mountain, and other places such as the Elk River valley were promoted as excellent hunting areas.

In addition to the development of land in the area, the United States government began efforts at resource protection. As has been noted, the White River Forest Reserve was withdrawn in 1891, becoming the White River National Forest in 1905. Other forest areas were withdrawn in line with national policy; Routt National Forest (1905) and Arapaho National Forest (1906) were created. With the withdrawal of millions of acres of grazing and forest lands, the government became, to a large extent, the arbiter of disputes between cattle and sheepmen, settlers and miners, and others. In the formation of these protected reserves, the early Forest Rangers who patrolled them became a symbol of the continuing efforts at conservation. It took a number of years for many farmers and cattlemen to accept the idea of grazing permits. The days of the old frontier were gone in the northwestern regions by 1910.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, thanks to the furor stirred up by the robbing of antiquities in the southwest, particularly in the Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon regions, the Antiquities Act of 1906 was passed to protect historic sites.<sup>15</sup> From this Act came the development of National

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1933-1934

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1933-1934. In Routt, Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties

<sup>15</sup> See: Ronald F. Lee, *The Antiquities Act of 1906*, (Washington: National Park Service, 1970).



Monuments to provide protection for historic, scenic, or archeologically valuable sites. One such area in northwest Colorado was the scenic canyon of the Green and Yampa Rivers, about which John Wesley Powell was so enthusiastic. Bones of dinosaurs had been found in the canyons of Utah and to protect these antiquities, an area of the canyons was formed into Dinosaur National Monument in 1915. This withdrew the lands in and around the canyons and provided protection from exploitation by unscrupulous developers. In 1938 the Monument was expanded into Colorado and enlarged to 326 square miles.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, Enos Mills, a long-time resident of Estes Park, Colorado and a well-known naturalist, campaigned for the creation of a national park and wildlife area near Estes. In 1915 Rocky Mountain National Park was created and thousands of acres on both sides of the Continental Divide were made tourist attractions. During the 1920's, the Fall River Road was built to provide a highway from Estes Park to Grand Lake, Colorado, and soon thousands of tourists were using the spectacular trail. Rocky Mountain Park helped draw many tourists into Middle Park, and later into the far northwestern corner of the state.<sup>17</sup>

One of the other "discoveries" in northwest Colorado was that of oil. Oil was known about quite early; in 1893 oil springs were located on Oil Creek, and the next year a company was organized to develop these fields. Nothing seems to have come of this effort,

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<sup>16</sup> See: Wallace Stegner, *This is Dinosaur*, (New York: Knopf, 1955).

<sup>17</sup> See: Enos A. Mills, *The Rocky Mountain National Park*, (Estes Park, Colorado: n.p., 1932).



however, for no major oil production took place until 1902. In 1902 the Poole well was brought in near Rangely, and soon an oil boom developed. It was short-lived because deep wells had to be developed to tap the reserves, and for the amount of oil gained it was not worth the effort.<sup>18</sup> The Rangely fields continued to produce on a modest level, and were superseded in the early 1920's, when a number of basins were tapped for the first time. In 1924 the Iles field was brought in, while in 1926 the Hiawatha field began to produce. Powder Wash came in in 1931, while the Thornburgh field has been producing since 1925. Tow Creek, one of the earlier fields, came in during 1924, and White River in Rio Blanco County had produced on a modest scale since 1890.<sup>19</sup> Since these early fields were discovered, numerous other oil fields have been found and worked. The real boom came during and after World War II when oil demand skyrocketed.

In North Park oil was discovered and later developed. The Colorado Immigration Board noted that in northwestern Colorado there were numerous oil domes such as the Moffat, Iles, Gossard, Elk Springs, Snake River, Thornburg, Axial, Beaver Creek, Sage Creek, Tow Creek, Deep Creek and Wilson Creek.<sup>20</sup> Yet, with all this potential, production remained low. The Hiawatha field to date has produced only 129,296 barrels,

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<sup>18</sup> CWA Interviews, *op. cit.*, 1933-1934. See Also: State of Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, *Oil and Gas Statistics*, 1974, (Denver: State of Colorado, 1975), p. 141.

<sup>19</sup> Oil and Gas Statistics, 1974, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-145.

<sup>20</sup> Colorado State Board of Immigration, *Colorado Mineral, Oil and Shale Resources*, (Denver: n.p., 1925), pp. 25-30.



while Powder Wash has produced 927,738 barrels and the Iles field has produced 357,753 barrels.<sup>21</sup> However, there have been a few good producers such as the Moffat field, which has produced 5,444,849 barrels since 1925.<sup>22</sup>

One of the last major economic developments in the northwest was an attempt at homestead colonization. In 1915 the Great Divide Homestead Colony Number One was organized to try dry-land farming in the area near the present-day Great Divide. Volney Hoggatt, bodyguard of Frederick G. Bonfils, the founder of the *Denver Post*, promoted this scheme. Hoggatt became the editor of a magazine dedicated to dry-land farming called, *Great Divide*. It was published by the *Denver Post*, and it was a mouthpiece for Hoggatt's schemes. Hoggatt also had the advantage of being the Registrar of the State Land Board. He was appointed to this post in 1912. The idea of colonization was not new; as early as 1911, the Great Northern Irrigation and Power Company had contracted with the State of Colorado to reclaim some 150,000 acres of land. The company failed to hold up its end of the bargain and went under.<sup>23</sup> Here is where Hoggatt used his position in state office to secure about 275,000 acres of land northwest of Craig. In March 1916 a train of immigrants arrived with "fifteen carloads of household goods and stock and one coach containing sixty men, women, and children."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Oil and Gas Statistics*, 1974, *op. cit.*, , pp. 65-67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> John Rolfe Burroughs, *Where the Old West Stayed Young*, (New York: Morrow, 1962), pp. 328-330.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332



Craig saw a new boom coming, and noted that there was simply no room for the hundreds of settlers expected.<sup>25</sup> By 1917 hundreds of miles of barbed wire had been strung, and water wells had been drilled; Hoggatt's colony of Great Divide was in full operation. The initial success of this colony stimulated a proposed colony in Carbon County, Wyoming, which luckily never came about. The colony survived until the mid-1930's with indifferent success. Hoggatt constantly promoted the venture through the *Denver Post*, until his death in 1934.<sup>26</sup> There is no estimate of the number of settlers who arrived in the area, but considering the land and a lack of water, it is likely that settlers departed as fast as they came. For Craig, the land boom never amounted to much, and the economy of the region gained little from the experience. The Great Divide adventure proved once again that "booms" were not the answer for northwestern Colorado; it is a good historical example of unwise land use in the West.

Within the last fifty years, this region has been under-used; newer industries such as hunting and fishing have helped take up the slack. Probably one of the most significant events in the area was the advent of the automobile and paved roads. In the early 1920's Berthoud, Loveland and Fall River passes were paved, providing easy access to the parks. Beyond Middle and North Parks, roads were extended through the Gore Range and into the Yampa Valley. The coal industry helped bring roads into the Upper Yampa Valley, while ranchers were served by new

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.





Great Divide, Colorado - Ca 1916  
*Colorado State Historical Society*



roads built from Wyoming south. Looking at modern roadmaps, one sees a single major road from Craig to Wyoming, and only one leading south into the White River country. A highway was built down the White River to Rangely and on into Utah. This major east-west connection was U. S. 40, which was built across the West in the 1920's (as the "Victory Highway") to provide a transcontinental roadway. This highway crossed the entire region and provided the backbone of the current road system.<sup>27</sup> The automobile provided cheap and easy transportation for the nation, yet the northwest corner, while greatly benefited by the car, remained isolated. The coming of cars and trucks certainly helped lower transportation costs, bring tourists into the area, and provide easier local movement, but the impact, as with the coming of the railroad, turned out to be rather limited.

One of the new industries that began in the 1920's and has been greatly stimulated by the automobile was skiing. Skiing clubs sprang up in Middle Park by 1921, while Steamboat Springs discovered the sport in the mid-1920's. From these small beginnings, the industry struggled along on a local basis until after World War II, when a major increase in Colorado's population helped the development of ski resorts. Automobile travel into the mountains became easier and soon the Front Range was covered with ski areas. As skiers moved west during the mid-1950's and well into the 1960's, ski resorts proliferated, and soon names like Breckenridge, Steamboat Springs, and Dillon were common to all skiers.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Early History of Routt County", *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> See: Nell Pauly, *Grand Lake: Ghosts of the Shootin'*, (Grand Lake Colorado: n.p., 1961), p. 75 and Burroughs, *Steamboat in the Rockies*, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-191.



The history of northwestern Colorado can be summarized as being an area that constantly wanted and needed development; the natural resources were there and known about quite early. However, a multiplicity of factors kept the region from developing along the same lines as did the Front Range area, which may have been a blessing in disguise. For all practical purposes, northwestern Colorado was actually an extension of Wyoming, socially and economically, until at least the 1920's. The reason for this was that transportation and services lay to the north. The mountain barrier was effective in hindering development in a traditional manner. From the days of open range cattle to mining and on into modern commercial uses, the land has been exploited, but never to the fullest possible extent. Traditionally, northwestern Colorado has been an area of great potential but because of such factors as poor transportation, the lack of capital and a sparse population, little actual development has occurred.

Recently, the northwest corner of Colorado shows the promise of a boom. Oil shale has shown great potential, while the re-birth of the coal industry, brought on by the increased demand for energy, has brought this corner new prosperity, and has caused radical changes in the social and economic make-up of the region. Possibly the coal boom will prove to be more lasting, and certainly it will have a greater impact on the area than other events in its history have had. With these new developments, the northwest corner may well have an economic future that had been promised for so many years.







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